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**Borno in the Rabih Years
1893 - 1901**

the rise and crash of a predatory state

Kyari Mohammed

Maiduguri 2006

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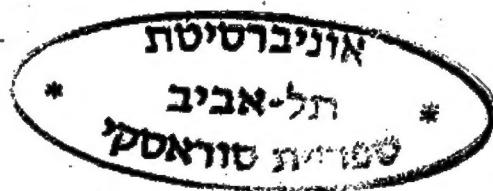
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II



Foreword

With considerable pleasure we present the second volume of **Borno Sahara and Sudan Series (BSSS)**, Kyari Mohammed's *Borno in the Rabih Years, 1893 - 1901*.

This most recent analysis of the "most turbulent periods in its [Borno's] entire history" as "this was the only time [...] when the state was taken over by a foreign invader" (p. 162) focuses not only on Rabih but provides a sensitive and broadly researched survey of the political and socio-economic situation in Borno towards the end of the nineteenth century. This study is a significant and all-embracing reflection on part of Borno's history that has for too long been shrouded in the veil of 'careful' recollections.

We acknowledge with gratitude the generous donation of fund by Yobe Investment Company Limited, Damaturu, Yobe State. Without this financial support we would not have been able to present this second volume of our BSS Series.

The Editors

To the memory of
Ya Balu (d. 1974), my mother,
for a very good beginning.

IV

Preface

This book is the outcome of a Ph.D. thesis written at the University of Ibadan under the direction of J.F. Ade Ajayi, emeritus professor of history. I am deeply indebted to him for the inspiration, insight, discipline and his continuous interest in my research and academic career. I appreciate the numerous hours spent with the late William Keith Hallam and Professor John Lavers, in what turned out to be the twilight of their lives, discussing our mutual interest on Rabih and Borno history. Dr. Louis Brenner was helpful during my brief sojourn in London and discussed with me the early drafts of my thesis. I am indebted to Professor Jide Osuntokun for pushing me onto the cliff hanger of an academic career, Professor Sa'ad Abubakar for sustaining the momentum, and Ronald W. Graham and Dr. LaRay Denzer for honing my research skills.

My appreciation also goes to the staff of the various libraries and archives mentioned in this work at especially Arewa House and Nigerian National Archives in Kaduna, Public Record Office in London, Ramat Library and staff of the Department of History at University of Maiduguri and the Kenneth Dike Library of the University of Ibadan for support and cooperation. I am grateful to the people and government of Borno State for not only funding my education but also for a generous grant to visit the foreign archives in the course of my Ph.D. research. My friends too numerous to mention provided succour in difficult times during the research; these include Allau, Abba Ali, Kashim, Tukur, Mukhtar, Bulama, Liberty, and Lukuman at various times. Professor Kyari Tijani and Ms. Gisela Seidensticker-Brikay provided a conducive environment for revising this thesis during my sabbatical year at the Central for Trans Saharan Studies of the University of Maiduguri. Finally, I thank my wife, Aisha, and children, for accepting with grace my long absences from home as part of their normal life.

The Author

Born at Abadam on 6th June 1963, Kyari Mohammed had his primary and secondary school education at Abadam Primary School and Government Secondary School, Monguno, between 1968-74 and 1974-79 respectively. Thereafter he proceeded to the University of Maiduguri where he graduated with an honours degree in History in 1984. He worked briefly with the University of Maiduguri before proceeding to the University of Ibadan where he earned both a masters and a doctorate degree in 1988 and 1995 respectively. Since 1988 he has been working at the Federal University of Technology, Yola.

A versatile and prolific scholar, Dr. Mohammed's research interests are wide ranging; from the history of pre-colonial Borno and neighbouring states to religion, federalism and the national question both historically and in contemporary times. He is one of a new generation of historians of the famous Ibadan School of History who understands the interface between history and the social sciences. This history and historically informed social science has impacted positively on his research as reflected in his numerous publications in history and the social sciences.

Dr. Mohammed had served as member of the governing council of the Federal University of Technology, Yola, between 1998 and 2004 and as member of council of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) between 1999 and 2001. He had served as consultant and resource person to numerous organizations both in Nigeria and abroad.

Dr. Mohammed is an Associate Professor of History, and currently doubles as the Director School of General Studies and Dean School of Management and Information Technology at the Federal University of Technology, Yola. He is married with children.

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Chapter One

Borno in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

The nineteenth century was a momentous period in the history of Borno. Borno witnessed a major change of dynasty, and was about to witness another before the colonial onslaught. The nineteenth century opened with the collapse of the Sayfawa dynasty - credited with a continuous history of ruling Kanem and Borno from the ninth to the nineteenth century.¹ The Sayfawa abandoned their centuries old capital of Birni Gazargamu after being sacked by the Fulata twice, in 1808 and 1809, respectively.² The invitation by Mai Ahmad (c. 1793-1810) to Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin b. Muhammad al-Kanemi, a Kanembu *mallam* resident at Ngala, with a sizeable Shuwa-Arab and Kanembu following to come to the aid of the Borno *Mais* led to the successful routing of the Fulata. This, however, did not prevent the destruction of Birni Gazargamu. These and subsequent events led to the steady and uninterrupted rise of Shaykh al-Kanemi to power, at the expense of the Sayfawa.³ For most of the first half of the nineteenth century, at least up to 1845, there seems to have been two, 'often overlapping political zones'⁴ in Borno. Although displaced from power, the Sayfawa continued attempts to regain power until the execution of Mai Ali b. Ibrahim, after one such unsuccessful bid at the battle of Minarge in 1846.⁵

The nineteenth century was, according to Murray

¹ Smith, 1971: 160.

² Palmer, 1936: 260; Barth, 1965, III: 603; Abubakar, 1980: 338; Brenner, 1973: 63; Tijani, 1980: 595-606.

³ For the circumstances that propelled al-Kanemi to the leadership of Borno, see Tijani, 1980:606ff.

⁴ Last, 1989: 590.

⁵ Brenner, 1973: 66.

Last,⁶ a period of transition when the office of the *Mai* was abolished and his court disbanded, on the ruins of which grew the *Shehu*'s court with all the trappings of a political office. To all intents and purposes, the al-Kanemi regime had supplanted and succeeded the Sayfawa in Borno.

The al-Kanemi regime was consolidated during the last years of the reign of *Shaykh* al-Kanemi and in the early years of the reign of Umar (1837-1853; 1854-1881), his son and successor. It was also at this time that cracks started appearing in the edifice, especially as from the 1850s, with the revolt of Abba Abdurahman.⁷ In 1853, Abdurahman forcefully removed *Shehu* Umar and took over the leadership of Borno. Abdurahman was himself deposed a year later, and the re-instated *Shehu* Umar wasted no time in executing him. These violent changes of government and the attendant dislocation of the social fabric of the Kukawa court greatly diminished the solidarity of the Borno ruling class.

In the 1880s, due in part to declining economic fortunes, the state resorted to arbitrary and extortionate taxation. *Shehu* Bukar (1881-1884), for instance, introduced the *Kumoreti* (splitting the calabash) in 1883. This tax required the peasantry to surrender half of its wealth in "cattle, horses and slaves"⁸ to the state. This extortionate tax and its methods of collection seemed to have further alienated the leadership from its base, the people. By the time Rabih Fadl Allah invaded Borno in 1893, the state was not only politically weak and economically in dire straits but was clearly lacking in national cohesion.

⁶ Last, 1989: 594.

⁷ Abubakar, 1980: 339.

⁸ Brenner, 1973: 877.

Land and Peoples

It is difficult, if not impossible, to even approximate Borno's boundaries in the nineteenth century. The borders tended to expand and contract in response to the relative strengths and weaknesses of the state, its leadership, and that of its neighbours. This seemed to have been at the back of Schultze's mind when he described Borno as a "geographical [...] entity".⁹ To the south Borno extended as far as the foothills of the Mandara Mountains, to the southeast and east,¹⁰ Lake Chad was another natural boundary. To the west, Borno extended to as far as the Kare-Kare and Ngizim lands of modern Fika and Gorgoram, and to the north-west to Muniyo and Damagaram.¹¹ The areas to the north remained the most fluid, it often extended to as far as N'guigmi¹² in modern Niger Republic, but for most of the second half of the nineteenth century, River Yobe formed the natural northern boundary.

The relations between the land and the people are intertwined in the Lake Chad basin. The people not only derive their livelihood from the land and the surrounding river systems but most of the struggles that would follow in the subsequent chapters would take place, and at more than one occasion, be decided by the terrain and the ability to harness it.

The Central Sudan has in the last 20,000 years or so been subjected to "sensational climatic changes"¹³ which has radically affected human habitation of the region. This area was between 20,000 - 5,000 years ago covered by a large body of water, the Mega-Chad, which extended as far north-east as the foothills of the Tibesti Mountains and as far south-east as modern Bama and Gashua in Nigeria.¹⁴

⁹ Schultze, 1968: 40.

¹⁰ Barth, 1965, I: 561.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

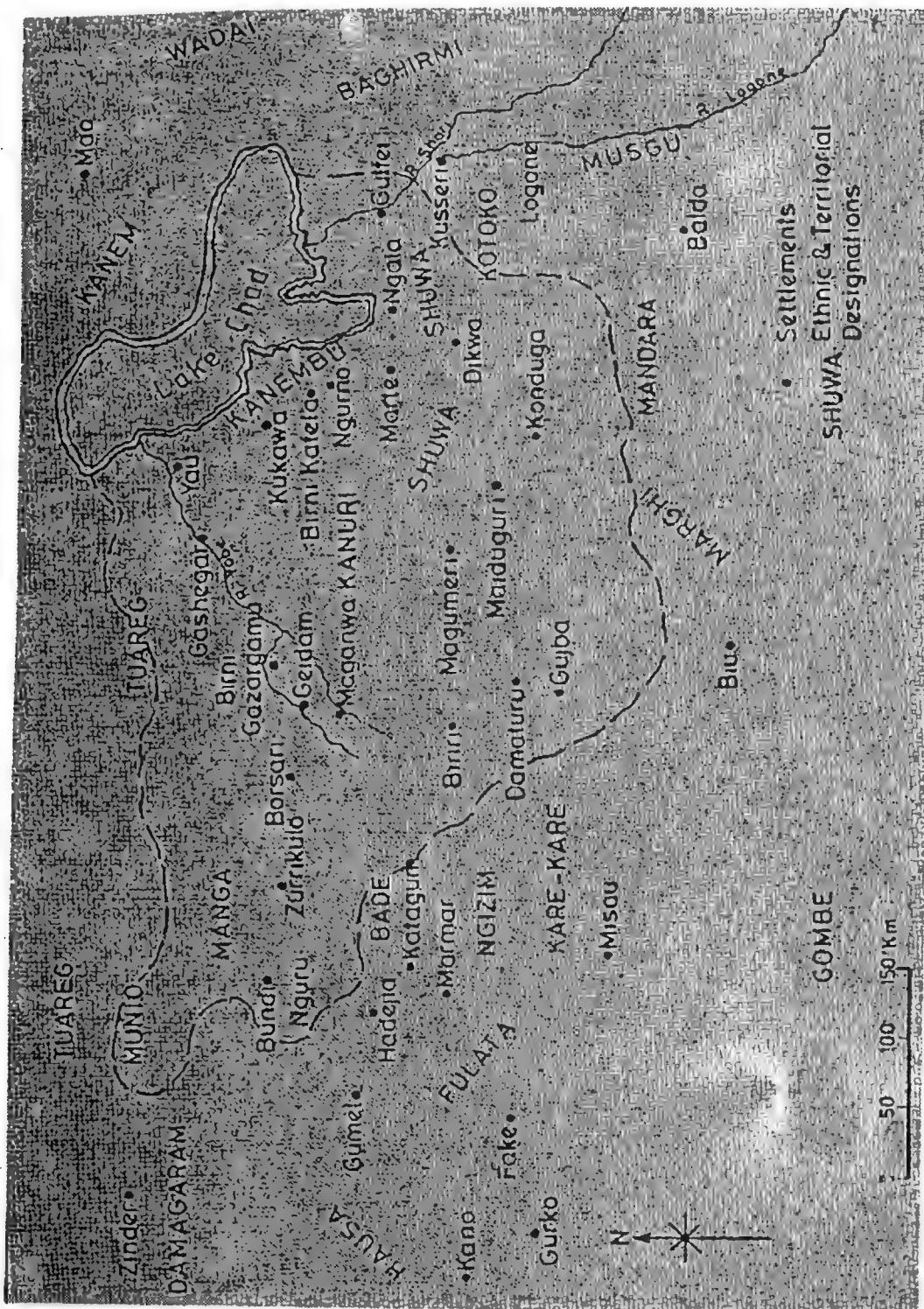
¹² Nachtigal, 1980, I: 99.

¹³ Smith, 1971: 153.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Between 5000 and 2500 years ago, the area witnessed further radical climatic changes amongst which may have been the shrinking of Lake Chad to its present level of 280 m above sea level.

Map 1: Borno on the Eve of Rabih's Invasion



It seems that it was only after this period that human settlement grew to the point of exploiting the landscape around the lake.¹⁵ These climatic changes not only resulted in the substitution of the dense savannah vegetation but also opened up the northern region to gradual but continuous desiccation to produce a desert of "sand dunes"¹⁶, stretching from around Agades to the Jurab depression, which had once been the deepest part of the Mega-Chad.¹⁷ The continuous desiccation of the northern side of the lake may have been responsible for the southward movement of peoples to the more conducive and wet south.¹⁸ The lake had supported an enormous range of animal life, including man, and has had tremendous effects on the environment.¹⁹ Principally fed by the surrounding river systems, the Shari-Logone, its largest feeder, annually pours 40.4 milliard m³ into the lake. Other sources include the rivers el-Beid, Yobe and Yedzeram, while about 6.6 milliard m³ comes from rain falling directly on its surface.²⁰ The lake in addition to providing a means of sustenance to pastoralists, farmers, and fishermen living in the environs, must have, because of its advantageous location in the midst of arid and semi-arid areas, been a focal point for the inter-mixture of peoples and cultures for centuries.²¹ It has even been suggested that its unique location, and the population mobility it encouraged, may have played an important part in state formation in the Lake Chad basin.²² In fact the movement of the Sayfawa from the east of the lake to the west in the fourteenth century has been attributed not only to the perennial conflict with the Bulala,

¹⁵ Smith, 1971: 154; Connah, 1981: 22; Sikes, 1972: 63 ff.

¹⁶ Smith, 1971: 155.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: 156.

¹⁹ Connah, 1981: 21-4; Lange, 1988: 436.

²⁰ Sikes, 1972: 21.

²¹ Tijani, 1980: 122.

²² James, 1987: 57.

but also to the desire to escape from the harsh and drier conditions of the north.²³ The influx of pastoralists into Borno for water and grazing land, though not peculiar to the eighteenth century, must have intensified pressure on land and the sedentary agriculturalists. Brenner and Cohen²⁴ have argued that the various pastoral groups in Borno: the Shuwa-Arabs, Fulata, Tuareg, Tubu, and the Kanembu, had started competing with the sedentary population for natural resources.

Most of central and northern Borno is flat, "vast featureless plains",²⁵ only interrupted in places by sand dunes. The terrain is predominantly sandy and increasingly so as one moves northwards.²⁶ In the areas to the south and southwest of Lake Chad are found lacustrine or lagoonal clays, the black loamy soil known locally as *firgi*. The *firgi*, a loamy messy marsh during the wet season, solidifies and cracks in deep fissures during the dry season.

The inhabitants of the border districts of Mandara and Blu to the south and the Kare-Kare to the west lived in mountainous areas. These areas, according to Tijani,²⁷ served as refuge centres of some sort from empire builders and slave raiders of times past, and the refugees in the course of history did, in fact, establish polities of their own.²⁸

Borno experiences a dry condition for most of the year. The rainy season lasts from July through October. It tends to start late and finish early as one moves from the south to the north, thus ranging from 160 days to 80 days.²⁹ The mean annual rainfall varies from as much as 1125 mm in the foothills of the Mandara Mountains at Mubi to as low

²³ . Brenner, 1973: 11-12.

²⁴ . Brenner and Cohen, 1987: 135.

²⁵ . Tijani, 1980: 124.

²⁶ . Brenner, 1973: 10-11.

²⁷ . Tijani, 1980: 125.

²⁸ . *Ibid.*

²⁹ . Connah, 1981: 32.

as 290 mm at Abadam in the north-east.³⁰

The rainfall is followed by a cool, dry season which starts late in November and extends to February, often referred to as *harmattan*. This consists of very dry wind, which blows from a north-easterly direction from across the Sahara. The *harmattan* causes a heavy haze and carries a lot of dust. This period ushers in a marked drop in temperature, often falling to as low as 20.0° C in December.³¹ During this period night temperatures can fall to as low as 7.7° C or even lower in the south.³²

In the hot dry months of March to June, the temperature rises for much of Borno to as high as 38.8° C in April. It is not unusual at this time to have maximum day temperatures of 44.3° C in the north and northeast.³³

The density of the vegetation is highly affected by the quantity of rainfall. Tuley and de Leeuw have shown that there is a close relationship between the climate and non-hydromorphic vegetation in Borno.³⁴ In the north, where the rainfall is low, vegetation is sparse. This belt is usually dotted with acacia trees and shrub savannah. Open spaces, often stretching for kilometres on end and dominated by seasonal grass cover during the wet season, drying up in the dry season, formed the characteristic vegetation of the area.³⁵ In the south where the rainfall is heavier, can be found much dense woodland vegetation, dominated by the family *combretaceae* and *leguminosae*.³⁶ Further south, the vegetation cover around the Mandara and Biu hills are thick and continuous.³⁷

Cropping begins with the onset of the rains. Sorghum and millet constitute the staple food. Sorghum is

³⁰ *Ibid.* 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ de Leeuw and Tuley, 1972: 121-55.

³⁵ Tijani, 1980: 130.

³⁶ Brenner, 1973 ; Connah, 1981: 32; Schultze, 1968: 76-112.

³⁷ Tijani, 1980: 129.

preponderant in the south. This crop takes two to three months to harvest if planted at the right time, on the sandy soil. The tall sorghum (*ngabuli*) is valued not only for its grains but also for its stem, used both as building material and animal feed. A dry-season dwarf sorghum, *masakwa*, is cultivated in the extensive *firgi* area to the south and south-east of Lake Chad, including most of the north and north-eastern parts of Monguno and Marte districts and the whole of Ngala, and north-eastern Dikwa up to and including Gulumba and Kala-Balge districts and beyond.³⁸ *Masakwa* is planted after the water has receded. The main work on the *firgi* involve the making of embankments to retain part of the lake water, which otherwise would flow back to the lake. The crops were transplanted into the *firgi* from nurseries. The yield, usually proportionate to the amount of moisture retained by the *firgi*, were very high, often twice that of the rain-fed variety.³⁹

Millet was another highly valued crop because of its adaptation to arid conditions. Most sedentary populations of south-western Bornu stretching from Maifoni to Konduga, and the northern districts of Kanembu, Nganzai, Monguno, Geidam, and Mobbar were millet producers. In these areas millet was inter-cropped with beans and groundnut.⁴⁰ Millet and barley were also grown along the valleys and banks of the River Yobe and the shores of the Lake Chad. Rice had also gained ascendancy as a wet-season crop in the valleys of the river systems of the area. Extensive vegetable gardening was practised on the shores of the lake and the river-valleys adjoining it. Tomatoes, okra, tobacco, and water melons were cultivated here. Maize, beans, cassava and groundnuts were also cultivated in these valleys.⁴¹ Fruits such as mango, guava and citrus were also tended.

The lake itself supports the Buduma (Yedina), who

³⁸ *Ibid*: 133-44.

³⁹ de Leeuw, et al, 1972, IV.

⁴⁰ Tijani, 1980: 136-7.

⁴¹ Brenner, 1973: 12.

are active fishermen. They spend most of their life on the islands of the lake, leaving it only occasionally for the purpose of exchanging their catch for such commodities as grains, meat, salt, and dairy products produced by inhabitants on the shores of the lake.⁴²

In most of Borno herding is as important as arable farming, and in the northern areas, in fact, more important. The most important of these are cattle, of which there were about five different breeds.⁴³ Goats were also important because of their adaptation to aridity and most especially for their meat and skins. Though the most widespread transport and pack animal was donkey, horses were also kept by the wealthy as transport animals. Further north, camels were in extensive use.

The Peoples

Most of northern and central Borno was by the beginning of the nineteenth century predominantly peopled by speakers of the Saharan branch of the Nilo-Saharan family of languages: Kanuri, Kanembu, the Teda-Daza and other related groups.⁴⁴ The areas to the west, which served as a "buffer between Borno and easternmost emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate"⁴⁵ covering the areas from Gashua to Fika was largely peopled by Chadic speakers, namely; Bade, Ngizim, Bolewa, Ngamo, and Kare-Kare.⁴⁶ Another concentration of Chadic settlements are to be found in eastern and south-eastern Borno, the area stretching from the Shari-Logone river system in the east down to the Mandara Mountains in the south. These include the Marghi, Kotoko, Mandara, Musgu, Gamerghu, Bura and Babur. The

⁴² Tijani, 1980: 137-8.

⁴³ de Leeuw, et al., 1972, IV: 53-4.

⁴⁴ Greenberg, 1970: 45.

⁴⁵ Mukhtar, 1992: 25.

⁴⁶ Smith, 1971: 158.

Buduma, who inhabit the shores and islands of the lake, also belong to this group.⁴⁷

Sparingly spread over a large area to the south and south-west of Lake Chad, but largely concentrated in the Monguno-Marte-Ngala axis, are the Shuwa-Arabs, the only speakers of a Semitic language in the area. The Fulata, another pastoralist nomadic group, speak a language of the West Atlantic group. They, like their Shuwa-Arab co-pastoralists, are sparsely spread throughout the Kanuri speaking areas, but are largely concentrated in western Borno.

Though agriculture formed the major occupation of the people of Borno, its seasonal nature freed the population to engage in other activities such as crafts and trading. Most of these trades were necessarily agriculture based, such as black-smithing, calabash-carving, butchery, grain and livestock marketing, tanning, leatherwork, and pottery.

Basket and mat-making were also widespread. Cloth weaving was also fairly popular. Though cloth weaving and garment-tailoring were the preserve of men, spinning was an exclusively female activity.⁴⁸ Numerous services such as well-digging, barbing, herb-dispensing were practised by specialised groups. Tailoring, cloth-dyeing and saddle-making were crafts peculiar to the urban centres. It was reported that by the close of the nineteenth century, rapid urbanisation and population expansion had given rise to specialisation and division of labour in some sectors of domestic industry around the capital.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Greenberg, 1970: 45-6; Tijani, 1980: 157-69; Connah, 1981: 35 - 6.

⁴⁸ Tijani, 1980: 141.

⁴⁹ Nachtigal, II, 1980: 159.

State and Society to 1893

As indicated above, the nineteenth century was epochal in the history of Borno. The first decade of the nineteenth century marked a progressive decline in the authority of the Sayfawa rulers. Although by 1800 virtually all the areas to the west of Borno including Hausaland were, at least, "nominally tributary to Borno",⁵⁰ by 1810, no part of Hausaland remained under her influence much less authority.⁵¹

By 1814, when al-Kanemi moved his base from Ngurno to Kukawa, Sayfawa authority had waned completely.⁵² With the routing of the rump of the Sayfawa and the killing of *Mai* Ali b. Ibrahim by *Shehu* Umar in 1846, the destruction of the *Mai*'s court at Birni Kafela and the dispersal of the survivors, the Sayfawa were completely annihilated not to resurface again.⁵³

Although al-Kanemi rule was consolidated during the reign of al-Kanemi and in the early years of the reign of *Shehu* Umar, the second half of the century marked a turning point in the history of Borno. In 1853, Abba Abdurahman with the support of a section of the princes and courtiers opposed to Umar's delegation of enormous powers to his *Waziri*, Hajj Bashir deposed the *Shehu* and took over the leadership of Borno.⁵⁴ *Shehu* Abdurahman was himself deposed a year later, because of his high-handedness and dictatorial rule, and Umar re-instated.⁵⁵ Umar immediately executed Abdurahman to remove the threat to his position. These changes of government and the accompanying violence had far-reaching consequences for Borno. Some of these include (1) the weakening of the army caused by the execution of Abdurahman, an outstanding

⁵⁰ Brenner, 1973: 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid*: 24.

⁵² Tijani, 1980: 606ff.

Brenner, 1973: 66.

Brenner, 1973: 78-9; Abubakar, 1980: 339.

Brenner, 1973: 78-9; Abubakar, 1980: 340.

military general, (2) the political and administrative disruptions and the alignment and re-alignment of forces within the Kukawa court with all its bitterness and bickering and, (3) Umar's return to power without as much as learning any lessons from his previous mistakes, by surrendering power to his new favourite courtiers.⁵⁶ Umar after 1854 invested much of the fiefs and administrative responsibility of Hajj Bashir on Laminu Njitiya. Laminu Njitiya, a former protégé of Hajj Bashir, was reportedly the "wealthiest and most powerful man" after the *Shehu*.⁵⁷ Bashir was killed by Shehu Abdurahman after the deposition of *Shehu* Umar.

The death of Umar in 1881 seemed to have accelerated the downward trend of the state, as the Kukawa court split into factions jockeying for power, thereby relegating to the background the political and economic well-being of the state. The disintegrative tendencies sowed under Umar seemed to have been abetted by a quick succession of weak and indecisive rulers.

Umar was succeeded by his son, Bukar, a tested warrior and a dominant figure in Kukawa, surpassed only by Umar and Laminu Njitiya in power, wealth and clientele.⁵⁸ With the death of Laminu Njitiya in 1871, Bukar became the strongest man in Borno. Bukar's military genius, charisma, wealth, and influence did garner him the support and followership of the courtiers and the royal slaves. Bukar was eventually installed as the *Shehu* in 1881. This is in spite of Waziri Ahmad b. Ibrahim Wadaima's attempt, albeit feeble attempt, to impose his son-in-law, Abba Masta, on the throne.⁵⁹

Shehu Bukar was business-like and attempted to check the downward plunge Borno had taken. He resumed military campaigns on the southwest frontiers of Borno, and

⁵⁶ Abubakar, 1980: 339.

⁵⁷ Brenner and Cohen, 1987: 159.

⁵⁸ Nachitigal, II, 1980: 301.

⁵⁹ Wisso, 1986: 89; Brenner and Cohen, 1987: 160-1.

stationed 10,000 troops on the Shari to the east, probably as a deterrent against the menace of Wadai.⁶⁰ Though politically astute and militarily strong, the economy overwhelmed Bukar. He came to power when the economy was really in bad shape, such that Borno had lost its credit worthiness even with its main trading partners, the North African traders to the North and in Borno, on account of increasing default.⁶¹ *Shehu* Bukar did encourage trade and boost the morale of the merchants by settling some of their debts; hence they started anticipating prospects of better days under him.⁶² There was not much improvement, however, as this period coincided with the fall in the volume of trade across the Sahara.⁶³

The economic crisis worsened as trade across the Sahara was drastically reduced. The 1880s depression in Europe also lowered the demand for Borno's luxury products such as ostrich feathers, ivory, and slaves. Faced with an economic crisis of enormous proportions, *Shehu* Bukar, in an attempt to generate revenue internally, resorted to the infamous *kumoreti*, an extortionate ad-hoc tax, which required the citizens, especially the peasantry, to surrender half of their wealth in grains, livestock, horses, slaves, and even currency to the state. This tax and its method of collection were so harsh and brutal that even children were held for ransom.⁶⁴ This state-sponsored extortion at a time when the peasantry was itself trying to cope with the reality of the economic crisis seemed to have further widened the gulf between the leadership and the subjects. *Shehu* Bukar died in 1884, at the age of fifty-eight,⁶⁵ long before the completion of the collection of the

⁶⁰ Abubakar, 1980: 341.

⁶¹ Nachitigal, II, 1980: 233-5.

⁶² Brenner, 1973: 87.

⁶³ Mukhtar, 1992: 57.

⁶⁴ Brenner, 1973: 87; Interview, Maina Mustafa, 29.12.93.

⁶⁵ PRO, FO 101/28: Barth's Kukawa letter dated 30th April 1851, where he gives Bukar's age in 1851 as 25. This puts Bukar's age at death in 1884 at 58 and not the "premature

kumoreti.⁶⁶

The sudden death of *Shehu* Bukar caught the Kukawa court unawares, for the *Shehu* had neither anticipated his death nor ruled long enough to have groomed a successor. His very short reign in the heat of a depressed economy did not provide any of the princes ample room to build the necessary economic base, political clout and following to aspire to the throne. The most prominent candidates for the throne were Abba Kyari, Bukar's eldest son; Abba Ibrahim and Abba Hashimi, younger brothers of Bukar, and Abba Masta Kura, their uncle.⁶⁷ Abba Kyari and Abba Hashimi withdrew and narrowed the contest to Abba Ibrahim and Abba Masta Kura. The courtier-electors bypassed Ibrahim and selected Abba Masta Kura. This was because most of the electors attained their position either under *Shehu* Umar or *Shehu* Bukar, and Ibrahim's disaffection with those regimes was a public secret. His undisguised aversion to *Shehu* Bukar's regime caused his isolation from state affairs during Bukar's reign. It was said that the two were prevented from undertaking military campaigns together when Ibrahim accused Bukar of trying to kill him in one such campaign.⁶⁸ It is, for these reasons that the courtier-electors chose Abba Masta, who was less likely to rock the boat by radically restructuring the court with its attendant political and economic loss to the courtiers.

The selection of Abba Masta, a son of al-Kanemi, as *Shehu* was normal and proper, as succession was by first generation patrilineal mode. But the aggressive, politically astute and ambitious Ibrahim found it unacceptable. Abba Ibrahim with the support of the slave-riflemen demanded and was installed as *Shehu*. With this development, all

death at the age of about forty-five", Brenner, 1973:86.

⁶⁶ The *kumoreti* was collected only in the Kauwa area, perhaps due to its proximity to Kukawa, before *Shehu* Bukar's death. Interview, Maina Mustafa, 29.12.93.

⁶⁷ Wissø, 1987: 91.

⁶⁸ Brenner, 1973: 86.

courtiers and princes with the exception of Abba Masta came to pay homage to the new *Shehu*. Abba Masta left Kukawa in open defiance of the new *Shehu*'s authority. Not even the offer of mediation, and a deputation, from the *ulama* of Kukawa to Abba Masta, could prevent the crisis from developing into an open clash.⁶⁹ In the ensuing skirmish Abba Masta was killed.⁷⁰ Once firmly established on the throne Ibrahim unfolded his plans to the consternation of the courtiers.

Shehu Ibrahim now worked to secure his position and expand his support base. He and most of his supporters were malcontents excluded for long from their perceived rightful access to power and affluence, which they could secure only at the expense of existing fief-holders, hence, fief re-distribution. This would be resisted but *Shehu* Ibrahim was determined to compensate his supporters. Though we concur with Brenner⁷¹ that certain changes are normal features of all new administrations, Ibrahim's changes were so personalised and widespread that it drew the animosity of a large section of the courtiers. For a beginning, he appointed his friend and confidant, Mamman Tar b. Ahmad Gonimi, as *Waziri*. Next, he replaced the six leading slave officials, *kachellawa*, including *Kachalla* of the right, Sumain, and, *Kachalla* of the left, Bazam Guyum. Zaifada Kadai, leader of the palace slaves and a Bukar loyalist was similarly removed.⁷² These changes were effected relatively easily because those involved were of servile status. It was different with the free-born courtiers and officials as they were poised to defend their positions.

It was rumoured at this time that, *Shehu* Ibrahim intended to remove *Shettima Kanuribe* Mala and replace him with a non-member of that family.⁷³ *Shettima Kanuribe* Mala

⁶⁹ Wisso, 1987: 92.

⁷⁰ Brenner, 1973: 88; Brenner and Cohen, 1987: 161.

⁷¹ Brenner, 1973: 118.

⁷² Wisso, 1987: 92.

⁷³ Brenner, 1973: 119.

died shortly afterwards and the title remained within the family, though most of his property was confiscated, obviously with the aim of reducing the family's economic independence. Ibrahim also worked to eliminate all opposition to his position by planning to assassinate all his avowed critics.⁷⁴ Amongst these were: Abba Kyari, his arch rival; Abba Anas, his uncle; Abba Abana Laminu, his cousin and some leading *ulama* in Kukawa.⁷⁵ This plan was not effected as *Shehu* Ibrahim died - in mysterious circumstances - as he was about to embark on his putsch, eleven months into his reign.⁷⁶

The short reign of Ibrahim did considerable harm to an already embattled court. It awakened the courtiers, especially those of servile status, to the precariousness of their position as it depended on the whims of the incumbent *Shehu*. This seemed to have further drawn the courtiers into succession struggles with the consequence of further dividing an already divided ruling class. The bitter scars of these struggles remained till the arrival of Rabih Fadl Allah and after.

The unexpected death of *Shehu* Ibrahim in 1885 was welcomed with relief by a large section of the court. The political upheavals generated by Ibrahim's short reign had convinced the courtier-electors of the need for a more pliable *Shehu*.

It was for this reason that they chose Abba Hashimi, Umar's fourth son, without hesitation. The more purposeful and active Abba Kyari was once more passed over, perhaps because the courtiers could not trust him not to revoke most of Ibrahim's appointments. Variously described as parsimonious⁷⁷ and reputedly unashamedly lazy,⁷⁸ Hashimi

⁷⁴ Brenner and Cohen, 1987: 93.

⁷⁵ Wissø, 1987: 93.

⁷⁶ Brenner, 1973: 119-20.

⁷⁷ Brenner, 1973: 121; Interview, Mallam Abba Usman, 9.11.93.

⁷⁸ Monteil, n.d. [c. 1894]: 342; Brenner, 1973: 120; Brenner and Cohen, 1987: 161; Interview, Mallam Abba Usman,

was renowned more for his piety and religious devotion to the level of detachment from worldly affairs than for statecraft and political sagacity. Hashimi was a weak ruler at a time when Borno needed a firm and determined leader, who could act decisively without vacillation.

Very much like Hajj Bashir under Umar, Mamman Tar under Hashimi was acting independent of, and without much regard to, the *Shehu*. This was raising discontent, similar in nature if not in scale, to the one of 1853 that led to Umar's ouster. It had also eroded the prestige of the *Shehu* in the eyes of the subjects. It is indeed doubtful whether Borno could have survived the 1853 type of crisis at that critical period of its history. Hashimi neither had the guts nor the will to check Mamman Tar's excesses, because of the "fear of failure".⁷⁹ Borno's hold over its provinces and vassals had so waned that, in the 1880s, Damagaram gained vast expanses of land at the expense of Borno in Manga and Ngizim territories.⁸⁰

However, the most serious problem that confronted Hashimi was economic. Except for the imposition of price control on the sale of millet in the markets of Kukawa, there is no indication that he took any measures to revamp the economy.⁸¹ Abubakar⁸² observes that Hashimi failed to realize that Borno's ailing economy could be saved by opening trading links with the Europeans along the Benue. That opportunity knocked, when Charles MacIntosh arrived Kukawa as head of a Royal Niger Company delegation in 1890, and attempted to sign a treaty with the *Shehu*. Initially welcomed, the expedition was expelled after two months and told firmly never to return.⁸³ Monteil attributes Hashimi's hard line position to the North African trading community's lobby who must have advised him, rightly, that

9.11.93.

- ⁷⁹ Brenner and Cohen, 1987: 161.
⁸⁰ Abubakar, 1980: 342.
⁸¹ Brenner, 1973: 121.
⁸² Abubakar, 1980: 342.
⁸³ Flint, 1960: 171.

the real intent of the mission was to seize the state.⁸⁴ The traders might have acted in defence of their own interest, as the establishment of trading links with the Royal Niger Company would change the direction of trade southwards to the coast. In this case there seems to have been a convergence of interests, as Hashimi was himself aware of the dangers posed by European imperialism and the harm it had already caused to parts of the Sokoto Caliphate along the Benue.⁸⁵

Hashimi was not a generous *Shehu*. The princes and the courtiers depended on the generosity of the *Shehu*, in form of the assignment of fiefs and offices, to maintain their well-developed taste for luxuries and the good life. Hashimi was not as liberal and patronising as his predecessors in dispensing largesse. The harsh economic realities, the gap between his resources and expected level of expenditure, and his own personal inclinations to parsimony might have been responsible for this; for as Monteil observed, Hashimi had over 350 offspring, most of who had reached adulthood as at the time of his ascension.⁸⁶ Hashimi was expected by convention, to provide for all the adult princes and princesses, but Hashimi provided only for his own children.⁸⁷ This no doubt brought division within the governing section of the Bornu ruling class and alienated a sizeable number of princes and courtiers from state affairs. Moreover, the reign of *Shehu* Hashimi was afflicted by a series of disasters, for as one of Brenner's informants, who witnessed the period, summed it up:

During the fifth year of the reign of Shehu Hashimi
came the locusts with the green chests. During
the sixth year came the plague called Wuromaram
[...] Toward the end of the plague, about the time

⁸⁴ Monteil, n.d. [c.1894]: 315.

⁸⁵ Fremantle, 1972: 8; Adeleye, 1971: 114.

⁸⁶ Monteil, n.d.: 342-3; Interview, Imam Ibrahim b. Ahmad, 23.12.93.

of harvest, came Rabeh.⁸⁸

The reign of Hashimi marked the lowest ebb in the nineteenth century history of Borno.

On the foreign scene, Borno's external relations were so badly managed and policy so confused, that it alienated most of its neighbours at a time their assistance was most needed. In Damagaram on the death of its ruler, Tanimu Dan Sulayman, the duly nominated successor Ibrahim Goto was ejected by his elder brother Sulayman who usurped the throne. Rather than support Goto's legitimate claim to the throne, Hashimi simply confirmed Sulayman's usurpation. This was a bad gamble, for Damagaram under Sulayman violated Borno's sovereignty with impunity, by attacking and incorporating dependencies such as Muniyo, Gumel, and Nguru.⁸⁹ Borno's assistance to *Mbang* Mamman of Baghirmi was another serious miscalculation, as it failed to stop the ascension of Gwaranga, who had the support of Wadai behind him. The defeat of Mamman amounted to, as Abubakar put it, the "defeat of Borno and a discredit to the reputation of Shehu Hashimi".⁹⁰ By this time the position of Borno within the militarily competing imperialisms of nineteenth century Central Sudan was very weak. There were no strong allies to depend on, and former vassals had become independent and menacing. By the last decade of the nineteenth century Borno was politically divided and economically very weak. It was, therefore, a weak and divided Borno that confronted Rabih in 1893.

⁸⁸ *Ibid:* 129.

⁸⁹ *Ibid:* 122; Abubakar, 1980: 342.

⁹⁰ Abubakar, 1980: 342.

Chapter Two

The Invasion of Borno

The sack of Manjaffa the second capital of Baghirmi, in 1893, sent signals that Rabih had designs on Borno. During the five-month siege of Manjaffa, *Mbang* Uthman Gwaranga sent desperate appeals of assistance to *Shehu* Hashimi of Borno. But Hashimi refused to help.⁹¹ This was because Hashimi was convinced that Rabih would not invade Borno. Even the counsel of the *ulama* that Rabih had designs on his territory was not taken seriously.⁹² The *Shehu* was not eager to risk a direct confrontation with Rabih by coming to the aid of Baghirmi.⁹³ More so, as Baghirmi had not been a loyal vassal of Borno for most of the nineteenth century; it was thought neither necessary nor wise to help preserve its independence.⁹⁴ In any case, Hashimi was not a war-like *Shehu* and, therefore, was not anxious to plunge Borno into war.

While the siege of Manjaffa lasted, Rabih received a number of delegations, including one from Hashimi, which came to enquire about Rabih's intentions towards Borno. The envoys returned having secured a promise on oath from Rabih that he would not initiate hostilities against Borno. Hayatu b. Sai'd, the *Amil al-Gharb al-Mahdi*⁹⁵, also visited Rabih at Manjaffa seeking his assistance against Mandara. He was sent off diplomatically with promises of support at a later date. The alliance was cemented with his marriage to Hauwa, Rabih's daughter, and they were escorted back to Balda by Fadl Allah.⁹⁶ Another mission arrived from Salih, ruler of Logone and vassal of Borno.⁹⁷ Rabih also sought

⁹¹ Brenner, 1973: 124.

⁹² Interview, Imam Ibrahim b. Ahmad, 23.12.93.

⁹³ Adeleye, 1970a: 231.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Representative of *Mahdi* in the Western Sudan.

⁹⁶ Adeleye, 1970a: 236.

⁹⁷ Babikir, 1950: 40.

and received corn and materials to clothe his army from Salih against the promise of payment.⁹⁸ It was at this time that Wadai convinced Hashimi to impose economic sanctions by blockading Rabih. This posed a serious threat to the survival of the Rabih army. The fall of Manjaffa did not secure Rabih's position as the whole region was denuded of food.⁹⁹ Rabih then entered Logone to the warm embrace of Salih but Rabih treacherously had him killed and the town occupied. This was to be his base for future operations.¹⁰⁰

With the fall of Logone all the other Kotoko principalities of Gulfei, Afade, and Kusseri submitted without having to fight.¹⁰¹ Hayatu had come to Logone to remind Rabih of his promise of assistance against Mandara. This time Hayatu came with his lieutenants, Yusuf Babikir al Mandarati and al-Hajj Muhammad al-Mallawi, accompanied by his troops.¹⁰² Rabih left Logone, after staying there for only forty days,¹⁰³ with eleven banners. He left behind a permanent garrison under the command of Uthman wad Shakku, governor of Logone or *Agit al-Bahr*, and his family including Fadl Allah and Muhammad Nyebe and the women. The Logone garrison was established to secure his rear, ensure the safety of the route to the east for free communication and as a retreat, in case that became necessary. Rabih was now poised to invade Borno.

Shehu Hashimi was in a dilemma. He had rejected Baghirmi's appeals for aid early in 1893 and accepted Rabih's promise of non-aggression gullibly. The *Shehu* had been chosen because of his passive qualities after the short

⁹⁸ Adeleye, 1970a: 232.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*; Hallam, 1977: 120.

¹⁰⁰ PRO, FO 403/233: Statement of Hadj Arfan Turki, Tripoli, April 10, 1896.

¹⁰¹ Adeleye, 1970a: 236.

¹⁰² Hallam, 1977: 124.

¹⁰³ Liman Ali Arkwoyami, "Rabih", Arabic ms, n.d. This ms is fairly popular in Borno, a copy was obtained from Mallam Usman Dikwa, son of the author, at Maiduguri in 1993.

but tumultuous reigns of *Shehu* Bukar and *Shehu* Ibrahim.¹⁰⁴ He had not fought a single campaign in his eight-year rule.¹⁰⁵ This passivity was to cost Borno heavily. The divisions in the Borno ruling class and between it and the ruled were as deep as ever. Hashimi's lack of firm direction and control seemed to have further aggravated them and exposed this basic weakness of Borno.¹⁰⁶ Mamman Tar was no longer the *Waziri* - he was not even the head of his family, the Ahmad Gonimi family - but remained one of the most powerful and wealthiest men in Borno. His wealth and his defiant attitude towards the *Shehu* marked him out as an object of fear and suspicion for Hashimi.¹⁰⁷ Abba Kyari,¹⁰⁸ Hashimi's nephew who had been passed over twice to the throne of *Shehu*, was very popular in Kukawa. His popularity and penchant for criticising his uncle's style of governance made the *Shehu* fear him.¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately for Hashimi these two were the best and most experienced military commanders in Borno. Neither of them was in his good books. Worse for Borno, the two were bitter rivals.

Furthermore, the *Shehu* was too close to the North African community for the good of Borno, perhaps on account of his sense of insecurity due to estrangement from his kinsmen. He was married to the sister of Sharif Shashimi, the leader of the North African community and sought his advice too often and on too many important matters of state. In fact, Monteil blames this group for the

¹⁰⁴ Brenner, 1973: 120.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Shaykh Abubakar al-Miskin, 26.1.94.

¹⁰⁶ Adeleye, 1970a: 236.

¹⁰⁷ Brenner, 1973: 121.

¹⁰⁸ Real name Muhammad al-Amin, named after al-Kanemi the founder of the dynasty. He came to be known as Kyari (old man) even as *Shehu*, a revered form of reference to the elder al-Kanemi. Abba Kyari and his direct descendants have continued to be known and referred to with this name. Interview, Shaykh Abubakar al-Miskin, 26.1.94.

¹⁰⁹ Monteil, n.d: 343.

expulsion of the MacIntosh Expedition in 1891.¹¹⁰ The embargo placed on Rabih though necessitated by the exigencies of state seemed to have affected the weak traders much more than their North African counterparts, as the latter were wealthier and had foreign connections, and therefore, were better equipped to survive the embargo.¹¹¹

Hashimi was a poor *Shehu*. He not only did not dispense of gifts to his princes¹¹² and title-holders as was customary, but actually extorted money from the latter very frequently.¹¹³ Though this can be accounted for by the declining income from tax and tribute and the large harem of wives, concubines and children,¹¹⁴ it could not but make him extremely unpopular. Hashimi had 400 wives and concubines and 350 children, of whom at least 50 were adults as at his ascension to the throne in 1885. Hashimi did not give out a "single dollar to any of the twelve prominent *mallamwa* of Kukawa"¹¹⁵ throughout his reign. This parsimony to a ruling class dependent on the *Shehu* to support its indolent life style and the changes he effected in the Imamship of Kukawa; by removing Liman Mustafa and replacing him with Liman Modu Aisami in the eastern section of the town, did not go well with a section of the *ulama*, especially those sympathetic to Liman Mustafa.¹¹⁶ Even natural forces were against Hashimi as he was confronted by a series of natural disasters, namely, the famine of 1880s, the locust plague, the pestilence known as *Wuromaram*, which killed many people in Kukawa,¹¹⁷ the

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*: 314-5.

¹¹¹ Brenner, 1973: 121-2.

¹¹² He was known to have given a horse to one *Abba* and five Maria Theresa dollars to another in his first four years in office. Abba Masta, Brenner Fieldnotes, 1965-6.

¹¹³ Interview, Mallam Mamman Lamin, 18.7.93.

¹¹⁴ Monteil, n.d: 342-3; Interview, Imam Ibrahim b. Ahmad, 17.12.93.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Mallam Mamman Lamin, 18.7.93.

¹¹⁶ Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

¹¹⁷ Brenner, 1973: 116, 126.

rinderpest which decimated the herds of the pastoralists especially the Shuwa-Arabs, causing economic loss, hardship and demographic movements.¹¹⁸ It is against this background that Borno's response, or lack of it, to the Rabih threat should be viewed.

Rabih Fadl Allah

Rabih Fadl Allah was born to Fadl Allah and Zaidan at Halfaya, an uphill town on the east bank of the River Nile, now a suburb of Khartoum in c. 1840.¹¹⁹ His father, Fadl Allah, hailed from Jabal Idris in the southern Gezira.¹²⁰ It seems Fadl Allah had a brief service in the Egyptian army before coming back to Halfaya where he established and ran a minor brick-works as at the time of Rabih's birth.¹²¹ Though not a particularly lucrative business it was enough to provide the family a means of sustenance.

Rabih was the youngest of three children. The others were Muhammad, and the only sister, Fatima.¹²² Like most Muslim Sudanese children of his age, Rabih started Qur'anic education at the tender age of seven.¹²³ In c. 1860, young Rabih enlisted into a Sudanese battalion in the Khedive's army in Egypt.¹²⁴ He returned home after an accident that injured and permanently deformed the index

¹¹⁸ Abba Masta mentions "disease of the cattle" in Hashimi's sixth year, Brenner Fieldnotes; Stenning, 1959: 80.

¹¹⁹ Imam [1974: 1] puts it at 1838, Babikir [1950: 7] puts it at 1845. This, however, would make Rabih too young for some of the subsequent events, Hallam [1977: 33], Lavers [1994: 1] and most recent writers seem to accept 1840 or a date a little earlier.

¹²⁰ Oppenheim, 1902: 13.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*; DuJarric, 1902: 14.

¹²² Babikir, 1950: 7.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Hallam, 1977: 33.

finger of his right hand.¹²⁵ By the time he returned to the Sudan, his father had died. It was at this time, c. 1863, that Rabih entered the service of Zubair Rahman Mansur al-Abbasi, better known as Zubair Pasha. Zubair Pasha had, by 1872, established an extensive principality that stretched from the southern reaches of Darfur to the Mbomu valley.¹²⁶ The affluence of *Dem Zubair* began to attract many traders and run-away slaves amongst the Baqqara Arabs and from Azandend Darfur. When their owners asked for them, Zubair paid compensation for about six hundred of them and placed them under the command of Rabih. This formed the elite corps of Zubair's army. Other units were later established, all of whom were placed under the command of Rabih until a regular well-armed and disciplined troop of 4000 was created.¹²⁷

In 1873, Zubair defeated the forces of Sultan Ibrahim of Darfur at Shakka and Ibrahim himself was killed in October of the same year at Manawashi. Rabih played an important part in both these battles, at Shakka and Manawashi; and seemed to have learnt the lesson that, in spite of numerical superiority, a large state was vulnerable to a sustained attack from a small, well-armed, determined and disciplined force.

Following disagreements with the Governor-General of the Sudan, Zubair went to Cairo in 1876 to put his case before Khedive Ismail, but he was arrested and detained. Rabih continued to serve Sulayman, Zubair's son and successor.¹²⁸ Sulayman, infuriated by his father's detention, rebelled against the Anglo-Egyptian government. It took Romollo Gessi, the Italian mercenary, two years to make Sulayman surrender on July 15, 1879.¹²⁹ The decision whether or not to surrender was hotly debated. Rabih had

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*; Babikir, 1950: 7.

¹²⁶ Hallam, 1968: 165.

¹²⁷ Lavers, "Rabih b. Faidulla: the Early Years" [n.d.], in the Lavers Collection, Arewa House, A.B.U. Kaduna.

¹²⁸ Hallam, 1968: 165.

¹²⁹ Adeleye, 1970a: 226.

passionately and profusely pleaded against the move, arguing that it was fool-hardy and suicidal to trust Gessi, especially given his close association with their Danaqla rivals.¹³⁰ If they must surrender, he suggested that it be done directly to the Anglo-Egyptian government and not through Gessi.¹³¹ In the alternative, he suggested they move westwards beyond the reach of the government.¹³² When this plea was rejected, Rabih moved westwards to the Kreish country, along with five other officers, namely, Abu'l Kasim, Musa wad Ja'li, Idris wad as-Sultan, Muhammad wad Fadl Allah, and Abd-al Bayin and about eight hundred troops.¹³³ A few days later, on July 17th, Sulayman and his officers who had surrendered to Gessi on guarantee of personal safety were treacherously killed.¹³⁴ Those five officers, who initially followed Rabih but had decided later-on to make their way back home, were tracked down, arrested and hanged at El-Fasher on August 6th, 1879.¹³⁵

The years of service under Zubair and Sulayman had given Rabih an invaluable experience in both military command and civil administration. He had under Zubair acted as the supervisory governor of the Ubangui Sultanates of Zemio, Rafai and Bangassu from a *zariba* [camp] on the Shinko River. Militarily, and significantly for his future career, he had learnt what a disciplined force armed with modern rifles could do to an apparently superior but undisciplined army.

When, in 1879, Rabih moved into Dar Kreish country he was soon joined by Arbab Babikir wad Hamad with over two hundred armed followers.¹³⁶ Many Jallaba merchants

¹³⁰ Hallam, 1977: 69-70.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.* 70 and fn.

¹³⁴ Adeleye, 1970a: 226.

¹³⁵ Wingate Papers, G.B. Messegdalia, "Diary of the uprisings in Darfur from 1879-1881". Though he erroneously includes Rabih among those hanged.

¹³⁶ Arbab Babikir was before then one of Zubair's officers.

also joined Rabih's following while still at Dar Kreish. This influx of Jallaba traders and the arrival of Babikir made it necessary that a leader be elected to guide them. Babikir was the first choice but he declined and proposed Rabih instead.¹³⁷ Rabih was chosen, after which he took an oath not to betray the interest of his followers.¹³⁸ For the next few years they continued to move westwards, raiding for slaves and expanding the strength of their troops and moving as far away from the Anglo-Egyptian government as possible.¹³⁹

Their area of operation was politically fragmented. Small chiefdoms were smashed and looted. They tapped the ivory and human resources of the areas through which they passed. There was no state sufficiently strong enough to check their activities.¹⁴⁰

Rabih had cherished the idea of friendly relations with Wadai. For this reason he sought the protection of Kolak Yusuf of Wadai as early as c. 1880.¹⁴¹ It was Yusuf's refusal that provoked him to make incursions into Wadai territory. Rabih was even then chronically short of ammunition and gunpowder.¹⁴² Though communication was maintained with Wadai, fire-arms and ammunition were excluded from the list of items traded.¹⁴³

In 1883, Rabih established his camp at Cha in Dar Kuti, from where, using guerrilla tactics, he operated as far as Dar Runga and raided in the area between Dar Salamat and northern Ubangui. It was after encounters with Sharif al-Din, the governor of Dar Salamat that Rabih moved southwards into Sara country south of Baghirmi.¹⁴⁴ The

¹³⁷ Babikir, 1950: 9.

¹³⁸ Adeleye, 1970a: 227.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*: 226.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*: 227.

¹⁴¹ PRO, CO 537/11, William Everett, "A short history of Rabeh Zubehr", December 19, 1898.

¹⁴² *Ibid*.

¹⁴³ PRO, FO 2/118, Wingate's memo. Military Intelligence, Cairo, March 5, 1893.

¹⁴⁴ Babikir, 1950: 30; Carbou, II, 1912: 129.

decade between 1880 and 1890 was spent raiding in Sara country in the middle Shari and in Dar Kuti. Meanwhile Rabih had established his control over Dar Runga and Dar Kuti. These bases were not secure enough for Rabih's ambitious commercial relations with the north. In any case, his hold over Wadai was precarious and his commercial relations with her were never so steady as to guarantee his position. The *Kolak* of Wadai had decreed the death penalty for anyone caught trading with Rabih in gunpowder and ammunition.¹⁴⁵

Given his inability to establish a firm and reliable base in the provinces of Wadai, Rabih had to look for alternative lines of communication without abandoning whatever hold he had over southern Wadai as entrepot to the Nile.¹⁴⁶ His increasing reliance on the middle Shari can be explained by the access that corridor guaranteed to the markets of Baghirmi and Borno. Along this route Borno traders smuggled gunpowder to Rabih and he encouraged the opening up of trade routes and markets all over his domains.¹⁴⁷ Both Baghirmi and Wadai were hesitant to open trade links with him.¹⁴⁸ In Sara country Rabih was encroaching on a dependency of Baghirmi, and Baghirmi provided the shortest route to the rich markets of Borno. Baghirmi had rejected Rabih's overtures; a confrontation with Baghirmi was clearly imminent.

Rabih had, during a visit to Dar Kuti in 1890, killed Kobur Umar b. Jugultum, his protégé, ostensibly for continuing to pay tribute to Wadai and replaced him with Jugultum's nephew, Muhammad al-Sanusi.¹⁴⁹ This new alliance was cemented by the marriage of al-Sanusi's daughter Hadjia to Fadl Allah, Rabih's son.¹⁵⁰ Rabih

¹⁴⁵ FO 2/118, Wingate's memo. Military Intelligence, Cairo, March 5, 1893.

¹⁴⁶ Adeleye, 1970a: 229-30.

¹⁴⁷ FO 2/118, Wingate's memo.

¹⁴⁸ Monteil, n.d. [c. 1894]: 346.

¹⁴⁹ FO 2/118, Wingate's memo; Carbou, II, 1912: 130.

¹⁵⁰ Carbou, II, 1912: 130.

returned to the middle Shari in December 1890. By 1890, Rabih's possessions included Dar Kuti, Dar Runga, Dar Abu Dima, Dar Banda, Sara, Gundi, and Ndam countries.¹⁵¹ In April 1891, the French Crampel Expedition entered Dar Kuti. They were well received, but, on their way out, they were seized and murdered by al-Sanusi's agents. On hearing the news, Rabih was not happy with the action but demanded and received the loot which included: ten Senegalese *tirailleurs*, one Targi, a girl named Niarinzhe, fifty repeating rifles, 175 percussion guns, twelve revolvers, 300 kilogrammes of gunpowder and 30,000 rounds of ammunition.¹⁵² Rabih's sway in the Wadai provinces was short-lived as Sharif al-Din conquered Dar Runga and Dar Kuti and re-imposed Wadai supremacy. Muhammed al-Sanusi submitted and was made governor of an autonomous Dar Kuti.¹⁵³

Rabih's attention was then turned towards the west and he seems to have become more aggressive and easily excitable. He brought the *Mbang Fong* of Ndam under control and punished the chief of Busso for attempting to flee to Baghirmi after feigning willing submission in 1891. He then asked *Mbang* Gwaranga of Baghirmi for peaceful relations and asked for clothes for his army. Gwaranga, infuriated by Rabih's treatment of his southern dependencies, refused his demands. Rabih attacked Baghirmi early in 1893. Baghirmi lost in open field encounters with Rabih, but made a determined second stand at Manjaffa, their fortified capital, on the banks of river Shari. The Rabih forces laid siege which ended with the escape of Gwaranga and the fall of the city in January or February 1893.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ FO 2/118, Wingate's memo; Hallam, 1968: 177.

¹⁵² Gentil, 1902: 235; Carbou, II, 1912: 130-1.

¹⁵³ Adeleye, 1970a: 230; Cordell, 1985: 66.

¹⁵⁴ NAK, KADCAPTORY, O/AR2, M. Kalle, "Labarin Rabeh" 1338 A.H./1919 A.D., Henceon Kalli, 1919; FO 2/118, Wingate's memo; Babikir, 1950: 38-41.

With the fall of Baghirmi it became clear that, this was not Rabih's main target. He moved down the Shari, sacked and garrisoned Logone and was now poised to invade Borno.

The Rabih Army

When Rabih broke off from Sulayman Zubair in 1879, his forces numbered only eight hundred divided into five banners. He was soon joined by Arbab Babikir wad Hamad with about two hundred riflemen. It was in the Kreish country that Rabih was elected the *Amir* of this "mobile empire".¹⁵⁵ Partly due to the arrival of Babikir and the massive recruitment which swelled the size of his following, Rabih re-organised his troops into eight banners of 120-130 riflemen each. These foundation banner commanders were: Ahmad el-Faki, Babikir wad Hamad, Hassan al-Wakil, Musa Jeheman, Ide al-Ta'aishi, Gadim al-Habani, Shanqa and Darfaqa.¹⁵⁶ This formed the nucleus of the army that moved into the middle Shari valley. It was while preparing for the invasion of Baghirmi at Busso, in 1893, that the ninth banner was created and placed under the command of Abba Shaib b. Umar.¹⁵⁷ The strength of the army then stood at about a thousand rifles. By the fall of Manjaffa the army had risen to twelve banners, as shown below:¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Hodgkin, 1960: 45.

¹⁵⁶ Julien, 1927: 55-122.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Table One: Early Banner Commanders

Banner	Commander(s)
1st	Rabih and Shanqa
2nd	al-Siddik ¹⁵⁹
3rd	Babikir
4th	Bilal ¹⁶⁰
5th	Musa Jeheman
6th	Ide al-Ta'aishi
7th	Gadim
8th	Darfaqa
9th	Abba Shaib b. Umar
10th	Uthman wad Shakku
11th	Shaykh Dahab
12th	Kapsur

This basically was the army used in the invasion of Borno. The discussion that follows will focus on Rabih's army after his establishment at Dikwa in 1893 up to his death on April 22nd, 1900.

The army was patterned along European lines, something Rabih learnt while serving in the Sudanese regiment of the Anglo-Egyptian army in Egypt. There was a definite hierarchy and chain of command. The army was divided into twenty-nine banners of between 50 and 300 rifles. Each banner had a banner commander, *Sahib al-bairaqq*, usually a close and loyal confidant of the *Amir*. The banner commander was, often, an old companion from their wanderings in the Bahr al-Ghazal or a personal slave he raised himself. A number of local recruits who of their own free will enlisted in the Rabih army had risen to positions of command. Prominent among these were Aji Gambo and Abba Gana Kanuri, Bornoan commanders of the 21st and

¹⁵⁹ Father to Ahmed el-Faki and already very old.

¹⁶⁰ Succeeded Hassan al-Wakil killed at Manjaffa.

22nd banners respectively.¹⁶¹ Others included *Shaykh* Hassan Dahab who joined Rabih at Manjaffa, and Sharif Ijele after the battle of Amja. They commanded the 11th and 20th banners respectively.

Each banner commander was assisted by a lieutenant, *wakil*, who took over in case the commander fell ill, was indisposed, wounded, or killed in battle.¹⁶² The banner commanders and the *wakilwa* formed the officer corps known as *Zubat al-Kubar*.¹⁶³ Most important military and, often, political issues were subjected to debate by this group. Under this cadre were the non-commissioned officer corps, *Zibatta as-singhar*, comprising of the *buluq* or sergeants. Each *buluq* commanded 30-50 *askar* (soldiers) or *bhityales* (cavalry).¹⁶⁴ Though some banners, especially the irregulars, had light cavalry, Rabih did not rely on either the cavalry or irregulars even though he came to use them sparingly in Borno. Rabih, the *Amir*, was the commander-in-chief of the army. Orders passed from the *Amir* to the *sahib al-bairaq*, to the *buluq* through the *wakil* down to the *askar*. The *askar* had assistants of 1-3 persons who usually acted as carriers, horse-boys, scouts, or messengers. They often fought alongside their masters, and carried them to safety if wounded.¹⁶⁵ The officer corps was almost invariably made

¹⁶¹ Aji Gambo and Abba Gana Kanuri were Shehu Ibrahim's messengers to *Mahdi* Muhammad Ahmad of the Sudan. On their way they learnt of the death of both the *Mahdi* and Shehu Ibrahim. Uncertain of their fate in the politics of nineteenth century Borno, they joined Rabih probably at Dar Kuti. These messengers and the activities of Jallaba traders in Borno seem to have been responsible for the widespread rumour of an invitation from within for Rabih to invade Borno. Our Borno informants make no mention of this. Babikir, 1950: 66 - 70; Brenner, 1973: 124-5; Adeleye, 1971:106 and fn

¹⁶² Julien, 1929: 73; Hallam, 1977: 176.

¹⁶³ Julien, 1929: 73.

¹⁶⁴ Babikir, 1950: 67.

¹⁶⁵ Julien, 1929: 75.

up of Muslims, majority of whom were Ja'liyin or Ta'aisha from the Bahr al-Ghazal. The rank and file were from a variety of national backgrounds with a lot of non-Muslims. Since leaving Darfur the rank of the *askar* had been swelled by recruits of southern Sudanese and Congolese origin, mostly, Kreish, Nuer, Dinka, Zande, and other Nilotic groups.

As the westward mobility continued apace, replacements and increase in the size of the troops brought in more Zande, Banda, Manja, Yakuma, Sara-Kaba, and Banana into the fold.¹⁶⁶

Recruitment was initially by a combination of purchase of slaves and slave raids but later almost exclusively by capture. On the sack of a settlement, the lives of those fit and able-bodied men who agreed to serve were spared, the alternative being slavery or death. Those who opted to serve were sent to the banners and if after a week of training military promise was shown, they were issued with arms and paid a little wage.¹⁶⁷ Apart from the fear of death and the ordeal of being sold into slavery, it was the prospects of booty rather than the wage that attracted most recruits. This seemed to have accounted for the large number of irregulars after the occupation of Borno. It was a standard practice of Rabih to select and enlist the best from the enemy after defeat; for example, many Borno soldiers were pressed into his service after the decisive battle of Gashegar. Table two shows the army banners at Dikwa, after the battle of Gashegar.

¹⁶⁶ Hallam, 1977: 179.
¹⁶⁷ *Ibid:* 178.

Table Two: Banner Commanders in Borno

Banner	Commander(s)	Number of rifles
1st	Karaje ¹⁶⁸	150
2nd	Arbab Babikir	300
3rd	Hamaden	150
4th	Sabun ¹⁶⁹	125
5th	Ide al-Ta'aishi	220
6th	Gadim	270
7th	Muhammad Nyebe	160
8th	Abba Shaib b. Umar ¹⁷⁰	150
9th	Fadl Allah	300
10th	Uthman wad Shakku	150
11th	Shaykh Dahab	130
12th	Kapsur	280
13th	Abi Shara	90
14th	Taha	160
15th	Faki Ahmad al-Saghir	110
16th	Ibad wad Tokoloma	150
17th	Jubara	140
18th	Abd el-Kadir Abu-Sekkin	50
19th	Jarma Turli	100
20th	Sharif Ijele	115
21st	Aji Gambo	100
22nd	Abba Gana Kanuri	90
23rd	Tal-atu	80
24th	Jenama	50
25th	Faki Ahmad al-Kabir	200
26th	Sharif Abu Nur	60
27th	Yusuf Babikir al-Mandarati	50
28th	Ahmad wad Brahim ¹⁷¹	200
29th	Razak Allah	200
	Sururu ¹⁷²	100

The recruits of Gashegar formed the backbone of the

¹⁶⁸ Wakil to al-Siddik the original commander who was left behind at Kusseri with 100 rifles due to old age. See fn 69.

¹⁶⁹ Replaced Musa Jeheman who died en route Kusseri to fight the French.

¹⁷⁰ The command of this banner passed to Garqar Abu-Halim after the disgrace of Abba Shaib at Gashegar.

¹⁷¹ The 38th and the 29th banners were Rabih's personal body guard [*bairaqq al Amir*].

¹⁷² In charge of the defence of the *Amir*'s harem.

second *bairaq al-Amir* or 29th banner under Ahmad wad Brahim. *Kachella Abdu*,¹⁷³ a veteran of both Legarwa and Gashegar and Hashimi's bodyguard, was one of those enlisted.¹⁷⁴

The army placed great emphasis on drills and training. The *Amir* was reported to have personally instructed his bodyguards in the use of firearms.¹⁷⁵ Practice with the use of live ammunition was restricted due to the chronic shortage of ammunition. The men of the bodyguard banners were all armed with firearms. The soldiers were drilled twice daily, marching round three times in a circle for a start.¹⁷⁶ The *Amir* inspected his troops every Monday and Friday.¹⁷⁷

Troop discipline was an important aspect of their training. Even senior officers were liable to punishment for cowardice, indolence, negligence or any form of failing, as exemplified by the treatment meted out to Fadl Allah, Ide al-Ta'aishi, and Abba Shaib after the initial set-back at the battle of Gashegar. Each of them was caned one hundred times while Abba Shaib also lost the command of his banner to Garqar Abu-Halim.¹⁷⁸ No one in the Rabih army was above punishment. The *Amir* was as generous in rewarding his soldiers as he was strict and stern in discipline. The share of the booty accruing to soldiers after every campaign was quite substantial. Some of the soldiers were reported to have had over fifty women in their harem.¹⁷⁹

All regular soldiers wore uniforms. The *balta-balta* or patched Mahdist *jibbeh* was the standard uniform. Ammunition pouches were usually in belt or bandolier forms to suit individual taste. Cummerbunds were part of the

¹⁷³ *Kachella Abdu* was one of Hallam's informants in 1966. See Hallam, 1977: 179 fn

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Schultze, 1913: 32.

¹⁷⁶ Palmer, 1929: 108.

¹⁷⁷ PRO, FO 403/233, Hadj Arfan's statement.

¹⁷⁸ Babikir, 1950: 56; Hallam, 1977: 145.

¹⁷⁹ Foureau, 1902: 705.

dress. The importance attached to uniforms explains Rabih's desperate attempts to get clothes for his army both from Gwaranga at Baghirmi and Salih at Logone early in 1893.

Initially settled in a separate section of Dikwa, the soldiers were later removed to barracks erected for them across the river Ajiri, outside Dikwa.¹⁸⁰ The soldiers fended for themselves while at base but lived off the country while on campaigns.¹⁸¹ Permanent provisioning stations were, however, set up along the Dikwa-Logone and Dikwa-Mandara route.¹⁸²

The army had, since 1893, been permanently divided into two garrisons, located at Dikwa and Shari. The Dikwa garrison was under the command of the *Amir* while the Shari garrison, located at Karnak-Logone, was under Uthman wad Shakku. Between them they comprised 4,600 rifles, 2,300 horses, and 13,000 lancers.¹⁸³

By the time the army left for the battle of Lakhta in April 1900, the force had been divided into three garrisons.¹⁸⁴ Muhammad Nyebe, Rabih's son, was left at Dikwa with the 2nd, 7th, 16th, 20th, 22nd, and 25th banners comprising 1,105 rifles. Fadl Allah was located at Logone with 1,165 rifles of the 1st, 5th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 15th, 18th, 21st, and 24th banners. The *Amir* personally commanded the remaining thirteen banners including the two bodyguard banners. He had about 1,840 rifles. He was supported by numerous irregulars who between them had raised thirty rifles, 6,800 lances, 2,729 cavalry and seventy boats. Rabih, however, was careful enough not to encumber himself with too many irregulars.

The army band was an integral part of the force. It consisted of mounted and foot drummers. On horse-back

¹⁸⁰ Hallam, 1977: 182.

¹⁸¹ Julien, 1929: 74.

¹⁸² Babikir, 1950: 68.

¹⁸³ Julien, 1929: 74.

¹⁸⁴ The following is based on Julien, 1927: 108 ff.

were those playing the *bardiyya* (big drums), the *kungurum* (small drums), the *gashi* (long - trumpet), and twelve *al-gaita* (reed-pipes). Others include the ivory blowers or buglers.¹⁸⁵ The foot musicians played the *trombeti*, *al-gaita* or *guieta* and *mbaya*.¹⁸⁶ The main function of the band was to gather troops, boost morale while marching and entertain them while at base. It was usually the sound of the music that alerted enemies of the approach of the army. Some sources attribute the re-grouping of the army after the initial military setback at Gashegar to the musicians, thereby giving the battle to Rabih.

The intelligence department was the most important support arm of the army. The army never went to battle without having as much information about the enemy as could possibly be had. This department was under the command of Faki Na'im, who sent out missions and, often, went out himself to gather information; as in the case of his visit to Mandara in disguise as a representative of Kolak Yusuf of Wadai brandishing a forged letter proposing joint action against Rabih. On this occasion, Faki Na'im was shown all the town's fortifications and the Mandara army paraded before him, before he was sent off with a letter suggesting a *rendezvous* on the Shari. Using this information it took little effort for a small force under *Shaykh* Dahab to sack Mandara, which had earlier repelled a much stronger force of six banners under Babikir.¹⁸⁷

The Rabih army was a veritable war machine. Well trained, armed and disciplined, it had no trouble taking apparently superior enemies. For the officers and soldiers far removed from home, their fortunes were tied to those of the Rabih state.

¹⁸⁵ Julien, 1927: 73; Babikir, 1950: 67.

¹⁸⁶ Julien, 1927: 74; Babikir, 1950: 67.

¹⁸⁷ Lavers, 1972: 3; Joubert, 1937.

Invasion and Fall of Borno

Jarma Uthman of Wadai, who had advanced on Manjaffa with a view to attacking Rabih and disappointed on finding that Rabih had left the town a few days earlier for Logone, wrote to Shehu Hashimi of Borno asking for his permission to enter his territory and flush out their common enemy.¹⁸⁸ As a result Hashimi called an emergency meeting of his full *majlis* and invited Mamman Tar to attend. Hashimi put the Wadai proposal before them. Mamman Tar advised that the Wadai army be allowed to "advance to Logone and that if they failed to turn Rabih out, it would be time enough for the Borno army to deal with him".¹⁸⁹ This suggestion was said to have infuriated Hashimi who accused Tar of cowardice and went on to inform Jarma Uthman that Rabih was now a Borno problem and that it would be handled locally.¹⁹⁰ Rabih, on his part, courted the Shehu with rich presents and a request for re-opening of trade relations with him. The trade embargo was lifted and a number of Borno traders set off for Logone.¹⁹¹ Hashimi also replied with presents including costly Borno clothes with concealed charms for Rabih. On discovery, they were burnt.¹⁹² Hashimi might have viewed Rabih's mission as another chance to buy time. The charms must have been sent to deal with the problem without having to fight physically. The potency of charms was widely believed in, in Borno and there is no reason to discount the possibility that the scholarly, religious, and conservative Hashimi believed this. Interestingly, even Rabih himself seems not to have made up his mind about his next line of action. He still had his eyes on Mandara but did not want to leave a hostile

¹⁸⁸ Statement of Sheikh Hassan Dahab, *Intelligence Report Egypt*, no. 37, April 13, 1895.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ FO 2/118, Wingate's memo.

¹⁹² Lemoigne, 1919: 109.

power on his flank.¹⁹³ There were also allusions to the effect that Rabih feared the possibility of a combined assault on him involving a Bornu, Baghirmi, and Wadai alliance. There was even the suggestion that the Wadai-Baghirmi allies should move westwards while Bornu pushed up from the north-west to catch Rabih in an enveloping movement.¹⁹⁴ This was a sound strategy that never saw the light of day. Given the efficiency of his intelligence network Rabih seems to have been aware of these plans. His agent in Kukawa, Jubara al-Jallabi, was the head of the Jallaba community. He must have been privy to the thinking in Kukawa. The opening of the Logone route to trade had eased the flow of information. Similarly, his agents in Wadai must have kept him informed of Jarma Uthman's plans while, Ghizzayin, chief of Jallaba and his agent at Abeche, kept him abreast of developments there.¹⁹⁵

The appointment of Mamman Tar as commander of the Bornu forces was received with mixed feelings. There was a division even within the military hierarchy as some *kachellawa* and *gremawa* did not like his appointment.¹⁹⁶ Mamman Tar had on appointment vowed to "capture Rabih alive and bring him to sweep the *dandal* (palace ground) at Kukawa".¹⁹⁷ It was widely believed that Tar was quite capable of accomplishing that task, after which Hashimi was told, a victorious Tar would return and install his own *Shehu*. Hashimi came to buy that position and, therefore, commissioned a thousand *ulama* to pray for the destruction of Mamman Tar.¹⁹⁸ For this reason, Mamman Tar was left to take the field against Rabih with little preparation and leaving behind more arms and ammunition than those he

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*; Statement of Shaikh Hassan Dahab, *Intelligence Report Egypt*, no. 37, April 13, 1895.

¹⁹⁴ al-Hajj and Lavers, 1973: 9.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Interview, Mamman Lamin, 18.7.93.

¹⁹⁷ Interview, Mallam Abba Usman, 10.11.93.

¹⁹⁸ Interview, Mamman Lamin, 18.7.93; Mallam Abba Usman,

went off to battle with.¹⁹⁹ It was bad enough that the *Shehu* had to concede the command of his troops to Mamman Tar, but in the circumstances he did not have much choice as the alternative to Tar was Abba Kyari, potentially more dangerous to Hashimi and his line. It was under these circumstances that the Borno army marched out to confront Rabih.

The Battle of Amja

Mamman Tar marched out of Kukawa with eight standards²⁰⁰ for Afade on the Logone route probably in mid-1893.²⁰¹ The marching army was delayed by having to deal

¹⁹⁹ Interview, Mamman Lamin, 18.7.93. An informant also mentioned 12,000 unissued guns left behind at Kukawa. This figure may be large but considering the losses at Legarwa and those captured at Kukawa, large quantities must have been left behind. Shaykh Abubakar al-Miskin, 26.1.94.

²⁰⁰ Kalle, 1919.

²⁰¹ There is a lot of confusion as to when this battle took place. Babikir [1950: 49]. Hallam [1977: 127] and Imam [1974: 12] put it at April. Hallam even mentions 'one of those freak dry-season storms which are not uncommon in Borno' thus justifying the rains for a battle he places in the dry-season. He seems to cast doubt on his position when he mentions exceptionally early rains or another dry season storm at Legarwa too [1977:128]. All the sources seem to agree that the battle was preceded by rains, suggesting a date later than April as the rains rarely commence before June in Borno. Sharif Hassan places it at Rabi Awwal i.e. 29 September - 22 October 1893, See Al-Hajj and Lavers, 1973: 9; the RNC interpreter either mis-translated or corrected this to June [PRO Niger territories, Confidential Print, April 13, 1896]. Shaykh Hassan Dahab gives November [*Egyptian Intelligence Report*, no. 37, April 1895]. John Lavers [1977: 8] puts it tentatively at end of July or beginning of August. Wingate saw a letter dated Kukawa, 11 Muharram 1311

with the restive Shiuwa-Arabs along the way.²⁰² Though this delayed their arrival, it was necessary to safeguard their rear. A second contingent led by *Kachella* Agit Aburas, the *Kachella Bunduguma*,²⁰³ with four²⁰⁴ additional standards re-enforced Mamman Tar, bringing the total number of standards to twelve. The army was estimated at 3,000 strong²⁰⁵ half of which was mounted and the other half, the infantry, was partly armed with guns. Of these not more than half were regulars. The arrival of the second contingent under Agit Aburas must have been delayed due either to the last minute decision of the *kachellawa* and *gremawa* to join in the campaign, or deliberately delayed, to allow late-comers and those coming from far distance to assemble. Rabih, who was aware of the movement of the

A.H./July 25, 1893 which mentioned Mamman Tar just having left Kukawa to fight Rabih [FO 2/118: Wingate's memo]. Wingate's July 25 seems to agree with some of our local sources, Alkali Bukar [Brenner Fieldnotes], for example, places the battle of Legarwa at August during the rainy season, and since Yunus [1970] mentions a period of 5-6 weeks between the battles of Amja and Legarwa, that leaves us with a date in early or mid July.

²⁰² Yunus, 1970.

²⁰³ Commander of musketeers.

²⁰⁴ Yunus, 1970.

²⁰⁵ The Borno standards numbered between 100 and 150 giving a total strength of between 1,200 and 1,800, which is not far from Shaykh Dahab's 1000 cavalry and 600 riflemen, Egyptian Intelligence Report, no. 37, April 13, 1895. McClintock mentions 3,000 which do not really conflict with Shaykh Dahab's, as the latter also mentions large numbers of natives armed with spears and clubs'. Hadj Arfan's 12,000 (FO 403/233), Babikir's 15,000 infantry and 30,000 horsemen are clearly highly inflated [1950:46]. Gentil [1902: 234], Urvoy [1949: 126], Imam [1974: 12] all quote 30,000. Hallam's 7,000 regular troops on the authority of Kachella Tijani, who was there as a young boy with his father, is realistic [1977:126]. The tendency to exaggerate the number of troops in battle is not peculiar to Borno.

Borno troops, moved to the south-west of Afade with eleven banners and crossed the river Kalia into the Balge area, home of the Bani-Hassan section of the Shuwa-Arabs who were friendly to Rabih. The suppression of the Shuwa-Arabs along the route and the involvement of Shuwa-Arab chieftains like *Shaykh* Dahab seemed to have made Rabih receptive to them. From Balge the Rabih army moved into Amja. The Borno army moved rapidly to Ngala where it discovered that Rabih had moved out to Balge, it then turned south to Amja.²⁰⁶

Rabih, who had arrived Amja earlier than the Borno army, chose the battle ground. His forces camped on raised ground, giving his forces a dominating position overlooking the enemy. The area is *firgi* and rain the previous night had filled the swamps.²⁰⁷ Rabih fortified the area with acacia-thorn bushes and fire-pits and protected his flanks against cavalry attack with the swamp. The late arriving Borno army took position below the raised ground. Mamman Tar was quite confident. The enemy was numerically weak, only 1,300 - 1,400 gunmen, a negligible cavalry and a few hundred irregulars.²⁰⁸ Hayatu b. Sai'd, who had objected to the invasion of Borno, refused to take part.²⁰⁹ Hayatu had received support from Borno in his troubles with Lamido Zubairu of Fombina. Though Hayatu's non-involvement did not remove much from the strength of Rabih, as his following was militarily negligible, its effect on troop morale was devastating. For this reason Rabih had to give a rousing speech, pointing out that though outnumbered and facing the biggest enemy of their career, they were better trained, better armed and had greater experience.²¹⁰ The troops relaxed and waited for the attack.

The Borno army though having travelled a longer

²⁰⁶ Kalle, 1919.

²⁰⁷ Hallam, 1977: 127.

²⁰⁸ Hadj Arfan mentions 2,000 [see FO 403/233], Lippert, 1899 puts it at 3,000, Schultze, 1968: 277-8.

²⁰⁹ Interview, Alhaji Garba Abubakar Sai'd, 14.2.94.

²¹⁰ Babikir, 1950: 40.

distance did not rest. They attacked. Rabih's riflemen opened fire and held off the Borno horsemen, who re-formed and charged repeatedly. Their numerical superiority suddenly became a disadvantage; it impeded movement while troop indiscipline prevented any co-ordination by their commander.²¹¹ The riflemen had a field day picking their targets from the massed horsemen; when those in front got entrapped in the mud, those behind pushed forward, adding to the confusion caused by rifle fire.²¹² The horsemen abandoned their horses to fight but were shot down by the riflemen. The heavy dress and chain mail worn by the Borno army immobilised them and made them easy target for rifle fire. The chain mail was "good for arrows and spears, but not guns".²¹³ The Borno horsemen were so heavily clad that they looked like elephants and made them easy target for Rabih's riflemen.²¹⁴ Mamman Tar's troops were massacred. Tar, along with some of his lieutenants including Sanda Mbursami and Bukar Zaifatami were captured. Those who could escaped.

The number of wounded or killed was large. It was a great loss to Borno and her ability to resist. The large amount of booty including arms and ammunition was a relief to Rabih's depleted armoury. The decisive nature of the victory and the ease with which it was obtained had finally resolved Rabih's doubts and removed whatever misgivings he had about Borno. He decided to follow up his victory and advanced on Ngala.

Hayatu, who had refused to fight, withdrew once it became apparent that Rabih intended to carry the war further into Borno. It took some persuasion and a letter from Rabih, before a demoralised and weak Hashimi decided to take the field against Rabih. By this time five or six weeks

²¹¹ Lavers, 1977: 40.

²¹² Kalle, 1919; Yunus, 1970; Babikir, 1950: 49-50 - all agree the battlefield was muddy.

²¹³ Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

had elapsed.²¹⁵ Rabih wrote:

After salutation, and saying prayers on the Prophet; the earth is the Lord's. He gives to whom He will. When you receive this letter come to me with the bearer, and we will be one hand against those who oppose us; you shall have your country as before. If you do not agree to this you should leave the country, and if you choose to fight you must prepare yourself. I give you up until next Sunday, but you must know that you are responsible for the blood of the Muslims [...]²¹⁶

Hashimi sought the counsel of his *majlis* who urged him to fight. Hashimi then wrote Rabih, apparently as a reply to the latter's letter: "Do not spoil my country. If you are afraid of me you can go away; if not I will come and fight you at Ngala"²¹⁷ The *Shehu* was said to have enclosed a chain as a symbol of future punishment with the letter.²¹⁸ On receipt of the letter, Rabih had Mai Katunni, the courier, arrested and detained with the prisoners of war captured at Amja.²¹⁹

Hashimi, this time, personally led the Bornu army out of Kukawa, though the military command fell on Abba Kyari, undoubtedly the most experienced military commander after the capture of Tar. Hashimi mobilised as much forces as he could which must have numbered about 30,000.²²⁰ Most were armed with muskets though a few had

²¹⁵ Yunus, 1970.

²¹⁶ Account of North African traders, *Egyptian Intelligence Report*, no. 38, May 1895.

²¹⁷ Palmer, 1929: 23.

²¹⁸ Julien, 1925: 131.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Though McClintock puts this at 6,000 [Palmer, 1929:23], given the mass mobilisation and conscription, Babikir's 40,000 [1950: 51] or Arfan's 50,000 [FO 403/233] are not far off the mark. It seems the reality of the danger had, temporarily, united the Kukawa court.

rifles. The *wasiliwa*²²¹ who had repeating rifles were also conscripted.

The four cannons sent in by the *Sarkin Damagaram* were also carried along. The army marched to Legarwa via Ngurno and Ngilaiwa stopping on the way to allow for late arrivals to catch up with them.²²² They waited at Legarwa for nine days before joining battle.

Rabih decided to leave Ngala and meet the Bornu army in the open, lest the inhabitants of Ngala "rise against him".²²³ Even though he arrived a few days later than the enemy, Rabih had chosen the battlefield. He camped on the east bank of the Mbula stream to the southwest of Am Hobbio.

The Battle of Legarwa

Rabih at the head of 1,500 riflemen and 500 horsemen armed with spears took the field against Hashimi.²²⁴ He lined up his riflemen along the stream opposite the marshy ground and deployed his horsemen to the flanks.²²⁵ His army was now reinforced by the numerous Shuwa-Arabs who had flocked to him. The two pieces of artillery were placed in the centre,²²⁶ where the *Amir* put up his flag and took position.²²⁷

Abba Kyari deployed his troops along the left bank of the river, slightly behind him. He had taken his position on raised ground in front, where he could observe the movements of the enemy. Hashimi had remained behind in his camp not very far from the battlefield. Three contingents

²²¹ Kanuri term for North African traders in Bornu.

²²² Kalle, 1919.

²²³ Palmer, 1929: 22.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Palmer, 1929: 22; Babikir, 1950: 51.

²²⁶ Palmer, 1929: 23-4.

²²⁷ Lavers, 1977: 17.

of slaves under *Kachella* Bintumi²²⁸ were deployed to Kyari's right and five under *Kachella* Barka Jamal to his left. Then the household slaves and two contingents of courtiers were under *Zaifata* Mamman. In each case the infantry was placed before the cavalry.²²⁹

Not much seemed to have happened for some time. Though deployments were made in the morning, the actual fight did not commence until *Zuhr* prayer time, about 2.00 p.m.²³⁰ Then, Rabih took the offensive. He brought out Mamman Tar and *Kachella* Sanda Mbursami the biggest catch at Amja, and Mai Katunmi, the *Shehu*'s messenger, paraded them and slit their throats in full view of the deployed Borno troops. This seemed to have demoralised an already devastated army for they attacked in a "faint-hearted manner"²³¹ when they eventually did. This also forced Abba Kyari to commit the cavalry in a large-scale frontal attack, assaulting the left flank repeatedly with the slave regiment. Rabih's riflemen heavily massacred the cavalry from behind their cover across the stream, and Rabih's left flank had started giving in to the pressure from the slave regiment.²³² When the Borno cavalry withdrew, unable to withstand the increasing rifle fire, Rabih was able to re-enforce the flank and ward off the attack.²³³

When it became apparent that Rabih may take the battle, Kyari sent feverish appeals to the *Shehu* to show up physically and boost the morale of his troops. This failed as Hashimi remained remiss in his prayers with his *ulama*. It was when Hashimi got message from *Zaifata* Mamman from the battlefield and fled that the battle was lost. Even the

²²⁸ Variously written as Bendomi or Betummi, this was *Kachella* Bukar Bintumi, who succeeded his brother *Kachella* Modu Bintumi executed by Hashimi for theft. Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²²⁹ Lavers, 1977: 17.

²³⁰ Palmer, 1929: 24.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

slave regiment that put up a good showing lost heart. The Borno losses included Zaifata Mamman, *Kachella* Bukar Bintumi, Mallam Turuk, and *Kachella* Bukar Barka Shuwami.²³⁴ Others include Hashimi's son Abba Ibrahim Digelterema and Talba Ahmadu.²³⁵

Hashimi fled to Kukawa and camped at Daram, on the outskirts of the capital, contemplating a last stand in defence of the capital. There was no clear information on the movement of the invaders for the next two or three days. When a heavy dust cover was seen outside the capital, Hashimi ordered the beating of the war drums for a final stand to defend it, but it was said that no one came out. It turned out that it was a false alarm as the dust was from cattle and sheep returning from pasture. It was then that Hashimi, realising the people's total loss of confidence in him, prepared his family and fled.²³⁶

Meanwhile Rabih spent two days in the Legarwa area re-assembling his troops for the pursuit of the fleeing Borno army, and moving in slow stages not to fatigue his troops as he expected more fighting at Kukawa. He passed Burnaski, where he had 1,174 prisoners²³⁷ of Legarwa killed, and proceeded to Ngilaiwa via Ngurno. The inhabitants along the route evacuated their towns before the invading army; their property looted and vandalised by the Shuwa-Arabs even before Rabih's army arrived.²³⁸ From Ngurno the army moved to Gwange, just two hours from Kukawa. The next day Rabih entered Kukawa to find out that Hashimi and most of his courtiers had fled. Most of the courtiers and fief-holders went to their fiefs. Hashimi fled northwards into Mobbar country.

The amount of booty captured was, expectedly, large. These included 950 horses, 3,800 slaves, 500 *alkyabbas*,²³⁹

²³⁴ Lavers, 1977: 19.

²³⁵ Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Hallam, 1977: 130.

²³⁸ Interview, Muhammadu Dangi, 26.5.93.

²³⁹ Imported cloth worn on top of gown.

4,000 pieces of white cloth, 3,800 lbs of gunpowder, 160 rifles without ammunition and 100 flintlock guns.²⁴⁰ From the *Shehu*'s palace, the loot included 70,000 native dyed cloths, 1,000 *alkyabba*s, 30,000 lbs of red yarn, 700 lbs of gunpowder, and 400 lbs of iron bullets.²⁴¹

And from those *wasiliwa* who had not run away were seized 1,000 large ivory tusks, 70,000 Maria Theresa dollars, 250 bales²⁴² of ostrich feathers, 1,000 head each of cattle and camel, and 30,000 sheep and goats.²⁴³

Babikir who had been charged with the pursuit of Hashimi caught up with him at Lumburam on the River Yobe but the *Shehu* narrowly escaped capture by crossing the river, leaving behind a large quantity of booty including slaves, women and horses.²⁴⁴ From whence, the *Shehu* went to Geidam with a view to going to Damagaram.²⁴⁵ The pursuit lasted for one week.

²⁴⁰ Palmer, 1929: 108.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

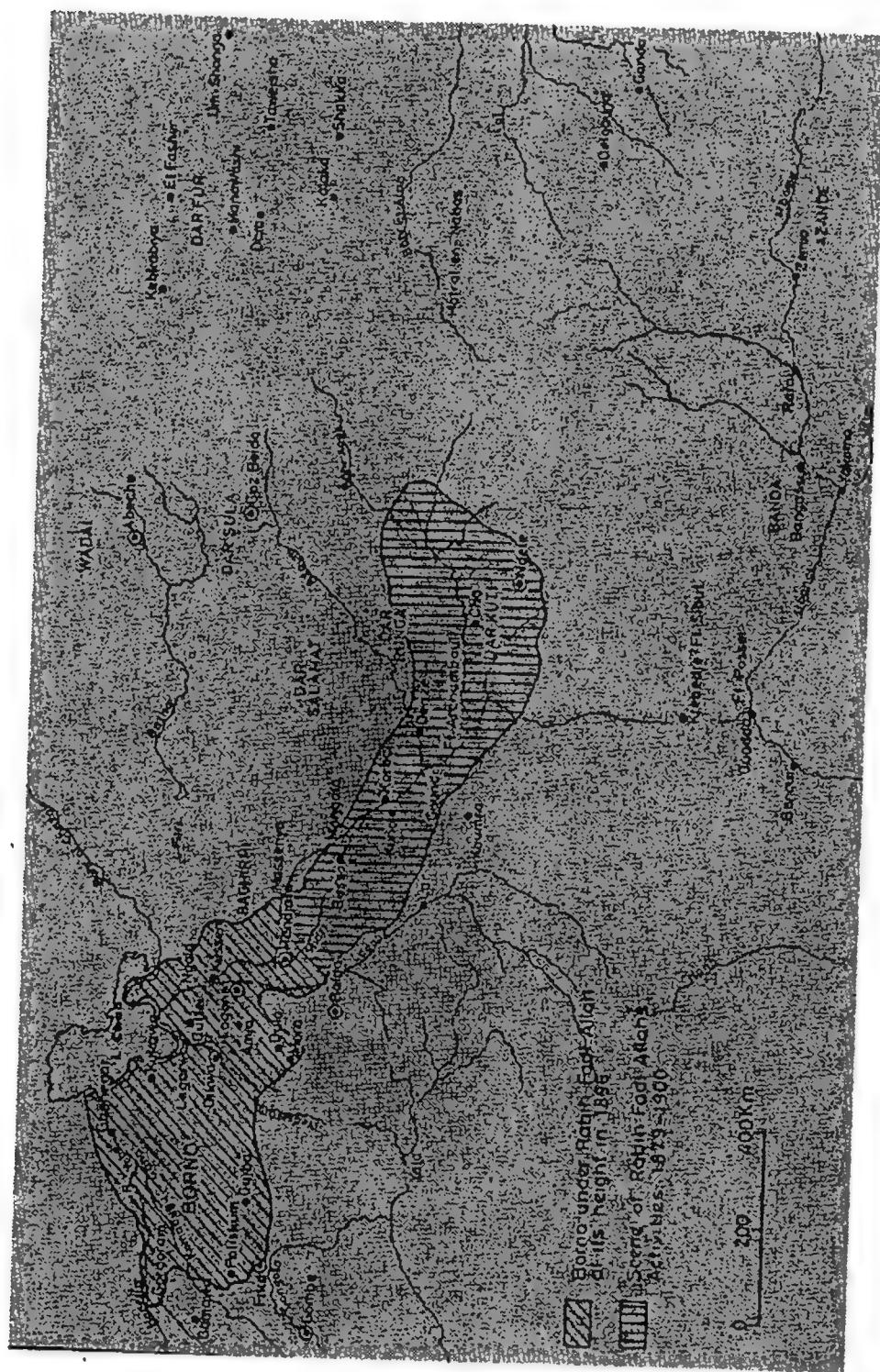
²⁴² Each bale weighs 100 lbs.

²⁴³ Palmer, 1929: 108.

²⁴⁴ Hallam, 1977: 132.

²⁴⁵ Imam, 1974: 12.

Map 2: Scene of Rabih Fadl Allah's activities, 1897-1900



Establishment at Dikwa

With the flight of Hashimi and the sack of Kukawa it did not take long for Rabih to realise the unsuitability of that town for a capital. It was basically its historic importance, having been founded by al-Kanemi; and the sentimental attachment of the *Shehus* - having been born and bred and all their predecessors buried there - that induced the *Shehus* to keep the town as capital. For Rabih, this was a disadvantage as the town would continue to attract the attention of the al-Kanemi dynasty. He, therefore, thought it wise to abandon it. Besides, Kukawa had an acute water problem, water was inadequate and of poor quality. Clay was also of poor quality such that the buildings required constant and regular re-decoration. The crowd that followed Rabih to Kukawa had further exposed the inadequacy of the capital. The *Amir*, therefore, needed little persuasion from Jubara al-Jullabi to move out of Kukawa and settle at Dikwa.

There were many things going for Dikwa. It was located adjacent to the cornfields of Balge and in the heart of the Shuwa-Arab herds.²⁴⁶ Thus, it was not only abundant of food but was a friendly territory, most of the Shuwa-Arab having joined his following. Dikwa also provided easy access to his garrison on the Shari. Rabih knew quite well that the remoteness of Kukawa contributed to the ease with which he entered Borno. He had no intention of being surprised from the east.²⁴⁷ Besides, Dikwa was much more defensible, located as it was, in the *firgi* plains such that no enemy could advance on it unobserved. Unlike Kukawa, Dikwa commanded and was strategically located on the routes to the Shari, Mandara, Hausaland and Fombina. The importance of this strategic location for military and commercial purposes was not lost on Rabih.

Above all, Rabih wanted a clean break from the al-

²⁴⁶ Hallam, 1977: 157.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Kanemi past by setting up his own capital. He anticipated a re-organised resistance for the taking of Kukawa given its attachment to the scions of al-Kanemi. *Shehu* Kyari's desire to enter Kukawa and pray at the tomb of the *Shehus* before advancing on Rabih at Dikwa illustrates this point. They were, however, intercepted by Rabih at Gashegar.²⁴⁸

On Babikir's return from his pursuit of *Shehu* Hashimi, Rabih ordered the evacuation of Kukawa. The town was completely razed to the ground to discourage resettlement.²⁴⁹ And Rabih entered Dikwa on October 21, 1893.²⁵⁰ On entry Rabih displaced *Dikwama* Adam, who moved to Gajibo with his followers.²⁵¹ For the next seven years Dikwa remained the Rabih capital of Borno.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 142; Lavers, 1977: 30.

²⁴⁹ Interview, Mallam Abba Usman, 10.11.93.

²⁵⁰ Arkwoyami, "Rabih". Yunus [1970] puts it at 10 Jumadha Thani, i.e. December 29, 1893, and a stay of three months at Kukawa. Other accounts vary: Hadj Arfan 20 days [FO 403\233], McClintock one month [Palmer, 1929]. McClintock's one month agrees with Arkwoyami, local sources and our chronology of the battles.

²⁵¹ Hallam, 1977: 158.

Chapter Three

Occupation and Resistance

The resounding defeat of the Borno forces after only two encounters at Amja and Legarwa, the ease with which these were obtained, and the flight of *Shehu Hashimi* before the invaders without putting up a spirited defence of the capital convinced the peasantry of the decadence of the state and the ruling class. These events also brought to the fore the inability of the ruling class to provide purposeful and determined leadership to confront Rabih. The peasantry, therefore, completely lost hope in the ability of the al-Kanemi dynasty and the aristocracy to liberate Borno from the clutches of Rabih and his plundering army. The rise of *Mallam Abu Gantur*²⁵² and his vast peasant followership was an expression of this loss of confidence. Furthermore, the people of Borno were, no doubt, aware of the wranglings and power tussle that gripped the house of al-Kanemi, divided as they were into three different camps and settled at three different locations in the neighbourhood of Geidam.²⁵³ Unfortunately all the three groups under Abba Anas, Hashimi, and Abba Kyari were working at cross-purposes as none seemed to have made contacts with the others. It was in these circumstances that *Mallam Abu Gantur* appeared on the scene.

Mallam Abu Gantur's Resistance

Rabih was overseeing the development of his new capital when news got to him of a mass revolt in the Nganzai area in January 1894. *Mallam Abu Gantur* was a young Koyam *mallam* (scholar) of about twenty years of age, of

²⁵² Also known as *Faqih Gantur*, *Mallam Buki* and *Mallam Njimtilo*.

²⁵³ *Abba Masta*, Brenner Fieldnotes.

great learning, piety, bravery, and enormous physical strength.²⁵⁴

Mallam Gantur started preaching in the Nganzai area, close to Gajiram, denouncing Rabih and his army as criminals and adventurous vandals. He soon started gathering Borno patriots with the sole aim of throwing off the Rabih yoke.²⁵⁵ Having assured his followers that divine intervention would follow his prayers, he got a large following estimated at 20,000 and prepared for the onslaught on Rabih.²⁵⁶ The young *mallam* was said to have claimed control over *jinns* and styled himself as *Sahib al-Jinun*, commander of *jinns*.²⁵⁷ The *jinns* were said to make his forces invisible and invincible while fighting and to actually taking part in the fight on their side. A substantial part of his followers was, therefore, armed with horse-bridles, sticks and corn-stalks, believing that nothing more was necessary.²⁵⁸ However, the pragmatic amongst them were armed with spears and some even with firearms. It was their frustration and utter disgust with the Borno aristocracy over its capitulation to Rabih, their belief in the supernatural powers of Gantur and his leadership, and their enthusiasm that propelled them into action.

The uprising was a spontaneous, uncoordinated mass action. Followers joined on their way to Dikwa. It exhibited some millenarian tendencies, though even that was not well defined. Rabih not realising the gravity of the uprising sent a messenger ordering the *mallam* to come to Dikwa and submit to him. The rebel *mallam* sent the messenger to go and tell his master that he would go to Dikwa alright but not to submit but to fight and drive out

²⁵⁴ Palmer, 1929: 24.

²⁵⁵ NAK, Maiprof. 4, D.16: Report on Nganzai District, G. J. F. Tomlinson.

²⁵⁶ Interview, Imam Ibrahim b. Ahmad, 17.12.93.

²⁵⁷ Interview, Mallam Abba Usman, 9. 11. 93.

²⁵⁸ Interview, Mallam Abba Usman, 9.11.93; Imam Ibrahim b. Ahmad, 17.12.93.

the invader.²⁵⁹

As a result of Abu Gantur's refusal to answer Rabih's call, Rabih despatched Aji Gambo with two hundred guns to quell the uprising and bring the area under control.²⁶⁰ This force was routed. Aji Gambo was himself caught and thoroughly beaten before being released. He continued to suffer from the wounds sustained there till his death in 1900.²⁶¹ This initial success further emboldened them and they marched towards Dikwa, in the process burning Kulli, Marte, and Mussene; apparently for their refusal to participate in the action.²⁶²

Infuriated by the disgraceful outing of Aji Gambo, Rabih personally led several regiments out of Dikwa and met the *mallam* at Damagda, near Mufiyo.²⁶³ The *Sahib al-Jinun* was dressed in an immaculate white dress, riding a white charger, and leading his vast followers. They chanted their magic wand "kun faya-kuun", "be and it is",²⁶⁴ as they met the forces of Rabih. It was a complete massacre, as most of the partisans, including *Mallam* Gantur, who was said to be "relässig in his [...] prayers"²⁶⁵, were killed. Their enthusiasm could not match the fire-power and discipline of Rabih's veterans.

There was no connection between the Gantur-led resistance and the al-Kanemi fugitives who had escaped to the Geidam region. There were no aristocrats and local notables involved. Even Gantur himself was not prominent in Borno, before then. The only reference to the al-Kanemi house was when Shehu Kyari was said to have been advised to deal with Gantur as he was believed to be planning to

²⁵⁹ Kalle, 1919.

²⁶⁰ Abba Ali, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²⁶¹ Kalle, 1919.

²⁶² NAK, Maiprof. 4, D. 6: Report on Nganzai District, G. J. F. Tomlinson, 1918.

²⁶³ *Ibid*; Lavers, 1977: 28 gives this place as Ngomati; Palmer, 1929: 24 gives this place as Kulli.

²⁶⁴ See Qur'an 6: 82

²⁶⁵ Palmer, 1929: 24.

defeat Rabih with a view to taking over Borno. For this reason, Kyari was said to have commissioned *mallams* to pray against Gantur's success. Following this, the *Sahib al-Jinun* was said to have married three wives at the same time upon which his jinn wife, the source of his power deserted him out of jealousy. This led to his defeat by Rabih.²⁶⁶ Whatever the significance of this tradition, the point is that there was no link with the al-Kanemi fugitives. If anything, it shows that they were not bound to be elated by anyone defeating Rabih without their active participation. This makes sense if viewed in the light of the manner in which Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi rose to power in defence of, but ended up supplanting the Sayfawa *Mais* at the beginning of the century.

After the defeat of *Mallam* Gantur, Rabih remained in the Nganzaï area and pacified the region up to and including the Maiduguri area. The *Amir* wreaked vengeance on the area as villages were burnt, camel, cattle, and grains were confiscated as punishment. The area was so denuded of food and livestock that, at the beginning of colonial rule, there were only seven camels in the otherwise camel-rich area.²⁶⁷ The severity of this punishment was to serve as a deterrent to other forces or areas that might contemplate an uprising of this sort.

It was while busy punishing the Nganzaï area that a new more potent threat to his position arose. It was here that Rabih received news of the emergence of Abba Kyari as *Shehu* and the latter's plans to drive him out of Borno.

²⁶⁶ Interview, *Mallam* Abba Usman, 10.11.93. A variant of the same story was narrated by Imam Ibrahim b. Ahmad; this version mentions Rabih as having presented a beautiful bride to *Mallam* Gantur. In both cases, it was marriage that cost the *mallam* his powers.

²⁶⁷ NAK, Maiprof 4, D.6: Report on Nganzaï District, Tomlinson.

Prelude to the Battle of Gashegar

With the sack of Kukawa and their escape to the north of River Yobe, the fugitive al-Kanemi along with some of their *kogunawa* [courtiers] and *ulama* [scholars] gathered in the Geidam area, where they formed three different power blocs.²⁶⁸ *Shehu* Hashimi who had crossed River Yobe at Lumburam reached Margiri on the north bank with only nineteen horsemen.²⁶⁹ From there he moved along the north banks of the river and reached Borsari, where he was refused entry.²⁷⁰ Too weak to insist, he went to Maganwa, about 15 km to the south-west of Geidam, to sit and watch out the turn of events. Abba Anas b. Muhammad al-Amin, the most respected, influential and reputedly unambitious of the al-Kanemi princes settled at Galamai, about 30 km to the south of Geidam. He attracted those members of the Kukawa court who still nursed the ambition of reclaiming their heritage but had no clear idea of how to go about it. Abba Kyari, the vocal and unavowed critic of *Shehu* Hashimi, had the largest following. His views about his uncle's cowardice, indolence, lack of vision, and unsuitability for governance have been vindicated by recent events. Abba Kyari's group settled at Gumsa to form the nucleus of the organized resistance movement. Kyari had sufficient following such that he crushed the uprising of the Shuwa-Arabs of Karabiri who had gone into open rebellion since Rabih's invasion of Borno.²⁷¹

Unfortunately, all the three groups were working severally as none had made contact with the others. The groups at Galamai and Gumsa were both working separately towards the deposition of *Shehu* Hashimi as a prelude to the liberation of Borno. The followers of Abba Anas suggested the deposition of Hashimi and the enthronement of their

²⁶⁸ Abba Ali, 'Brenner Fieldnotes'.

²⁶⁹ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 23: Mobber District Notebook.

²⁷⁰ Kalle, 1919.

²⁷¹ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 23: Mobber District Notebook.

leader but Abba Anas, seeking to reduce internal division and power tussle and convinced that Abba Kyari was the most suitable candidate, advised his appointment. Before this decision was communicated to his camp, Abba Kyari announced his appointment as *Shehu* by his followers. The Galamai group personally led by Abba Anas, accompanied by *Kachella Abdullahi Ali Marghi* and the sons of *Shehu Ibrahim*, namely, Umar Sanda Kura, Bukar Garbai, Abba Aji, Abba Abdulkarim, Abba Abdulkadir, Abba Jalla, Abba Rufai, and Abba Aji b. Kaloma Dogo came in to submit and accept the new *Shehu*.²⁷² Yerima Aji, who had been busy trying to pacify another Shuwa-Arab uprising in the Damboa-Gubgup axis, also came in to submit. It was the mature and wise intervention of Abba Anas that saved Borno another serious succession struggle. Anas' recognition had secured the legitimacy of the older generation and discouraged younger claimants like Umar Sanda Kura, the eldest son of *Shehu Ibrahim*, who had commanded the loyalty of his father's followers and was a strong contender to the throne.

Kyari wrote to Hashimi first informing him of his appointment and calling on him to come to Gumsa with his family "so that they could get their kingdom back from the giant Rabeh";²⁷³ and second, asking him to send in the paraphernalia of office.²⁷⁴ Hashimi, either because he had given up on Borno²⁷⁵ or was too weak to contest Kyari's position, or both, acquiesced. On receipt of the instruments of office, Kyari moved to Geidam where he was formally installed.

The news of Kyari's appointment was well received as many people came in to pay homage and offer their allegiance. With him were the prominent *ulama* including

²⁷² Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Hashimi while fleeing from the battle of Legarwa was said to have uttered "Good bye, Borno", *Egyptian Intelligence Report*, no. 39, May 1895.

Liman Modu Aisami, Alkali Muslim b. Abba Aji, Liman Abdurahman, the *Mainin Kinendi* and *Talba*.²⁷⁶ Most of the prominent *kogunawa*, including Shettima Abdulkarim, *Mustrema Abdul Nabi* and *Kachella Abdullahi Ali Marghi* were also with Kyari at this time.²⁷⁷ Hashimi also came in to make a submission and what amounted to a valedictory address, in which he said:²⁷⁸

I and the mallams on your side are equal today. I am one of them. What one mallam can do, I too can do. Your father was at the battle of Kayuri when I named you Muhammad al-Amin. The kingdom you are holding I left by force, but if God had decreed that I should die in my bed, you would have been the right man for the throne. After that the children of Ibrahim, and then my children. The kingdom is now yours. May God bless you my son, and your brothers. May God give you victory over your enemies.

Hashimi left for Maganwa the next day.

It was Hashimi's characteristic sluggishness that made Kyari take the line of action that he took. Hashimi had not taken any action to contain the revolt of the Shuwa-Arabs of Karabiri, led by Agit Ali al-Tunjurwi. It was Kyari and his brothers along with Shettima Abdulkarim and *Mustrema Abdul Nabi* that suppressed the revolt on their own initiative. It, therefore, became clear to them that Hashimi could not be relied upon to provide the brave and militant leadership that Borno desperately needed at this time. It is not unlikely that the two influential slave title-holders, Shettima Abdulkarim and *Mustrema Abdul Nabi* initiated the moves to replace Hashimi with Kyari, as they both had large armed following²⁷⁹ and were versatile in the

²⁷⁶ Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Lavers, 1977: 30.

politics of succession. It has even been suggested that Shettima Abdulkarim had promised *Shehu* Umar that he would ensure that his favourite grandson, Abba Kyari, would ultimately rule Borno.²⁸⁰

Shehu Kyari remained in the neighbourhood of Geidam for the next four months assembling his army, gathering provisions and generally mobilising for the great assault on Rabih.²⁸¹ He then moved to Gambaru near Birni Gazargamu, to the south bank of the River Yobe. The *Shehu* intended to go to Kukawa, where they would pray and offer alms at the tomb of their forefathers before marching on Dikwa.²⁸² Gambaru and the ruins of Gazargamu provided saltpetre for the production of gunpowder for their arsenal while the Yobe valley route guaranteed food and water for the troops. Their morale was high. It was their enthusiasm and the presence of a courageous and determined leadership that pushed them to decide to reclaim their heritage.

While at Gambaru, some of the *kogunawa*, led by Abba Beddowai b. Hajj Bashir believing that this "young boy's [Kyari's] intentions are not good",²⁸³ were plotting to move back to Hashimi and persuade him to cross to the safety of the north bank of the Yobe and await Rabih's natural end. The *Shehu* was alerted of the plot by *Shettima Kuburibe* Sanda Halima Kagumi. Before this plan was discovered, *Shehu* Kyari had intercepted a letter written by Hashimi to Rabih informing him that the state he wanted was no longer in his hands but in those of his nephew and pleaded that:²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²⁸³ Abba Ali, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²⁸⁴ Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

This Muhammad al-Amin (Kyari), if I die would be the next Shehu as it is his time. If he is victorious then there is nothing to say as I am his father and he is my son. If you are victorious and our reign ends, then I am but an old man so you must saye me and my family.

Rabih replied contemptuously on the reverse of the same letter, saying:

If your son became victorious then that would be that, and if I became victorious you would be one of my mallams, and you will be my uncle.²⁸⁵

This letter, the plot at Gambaru, and Abba Anas' counsel that unfortunately Hashimi had to go, convinced Kyari of the need to have his uncle assassinated in the overall interest of the state. With the assassination of Hashimi, the Borno party mourned for seven days at the house of Abba Mallam b. Hashimi, Hashimi's eldest son, before proceeding to Duchi. They spent the night at Duchi and moved to Gashegar, where they got the news of Rabih's approach.

When Rabih's intelligence service alerted him that Kyari was advancing on him via Kukawa, he moved at a fast pace and intercepted them at Gashegar. Rabih came to the vicinity of Gashegar and camped at Dumurwa.²⁸⁶ They were set for the battle to decide the fate of Borno.

The Defeat of Shehu Kyari

In preparation for the battle, the *Shehu* sent Yirima Mala Dogomami to summon all the al-Kanemi princes and gave them a rousing speech, thus:²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 23: Mobber District Notebook; Abba Ali, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²⁸⁷ Abba Ali, Brenner Fieldnotes.

You all say to me that Muhammad is proud and that I never listen to the words of any person. It is true that I have these qualities, but I do not boast because I am the son of Shehu Bukar and the grandson of Shehu Umar. All of us are equal in that and you too could boast of it. My boasting and pride is because I am brave. If any of you is so proud and wishes to boast of his bravery, here is the enemy. Let us defend what we inherited from our forefathers.

With these words Kyari ordered an advance on the enemy's camp. Rabih had, meanwhile, dug entrenchments on the banks of a small stream and sent a detachment of about fifty men to a point behind his camp in case retreat should become necessary²⁸⁸ and then waited for the Borno attack. *Shehu* Kyari led the attack personally; he divided his army into two and attacked both flanks simultaneously "with great dash and valour".²⁸⁹ In the close hand-to-hand encounter Rabih's forces were disorganised and forced to withdraw, leaving their camp, baggage, and women. Overjoyed with victory the forces of Kyari did not follow up their initial success but decided to loot the camp. The battle itself commenced at late afternoon, about the time of Asr prayer, and decided not to continue the fight until the following day. This was the error that was to cost them the battle. For Rabih, the good tactician, removed to his line of retreat and re-assembled his troops with the aid of his bugler. It was time to apportion blame, punish the guilty ones as a future deterrent and example to others. Three commanders had been identified as having failed to perform their tasks. Abba Shaib b. Umar, the commander of the eleventh banner, who had been entrusted with the task of personally engaging Kyari and had fled before him, was given one hundred strokes of the cane and removed from his

²⁸⁸ Palmer, 1929: 25.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

command. Ide al-Ta'aishi, commander of the fifth banner, on whose side the enemy made the in-road, was equally given one hundred strokes of the cane but retained the command of his banner, while Fadl Allah, who had a broken arm, was punished for allowing the women to be captured. Despite his wounds and the pleadings of his colleagues that he fought well, he also received one hundred strokes of the cane.²⁹⁰

Having restored order, Rabih advanced in the darkness before dawn. It was easy to locate the camp in the illumination caused by the burning. They moved in as close as possible before ordering attack on the celebrating Borno army. The surprise was total. In the confusion caused by the surprise attack and the illumination from the burning huts, the Rabih riflemen picked their target without difficulty.²⁹¹ Large numbers of the Borno army were killed, the rest fled. Shehu Kyari was wounded and was carried away unconscious, giving rise to the rumour that he had been killed.²⁹² Having confidence in no other leader, the resistance frittered away.²⁹³ The wound on the Shehu's lower jaw and blood on his garment further demoralised many of the soldiers who ran away; the widespread belief that he was bullet-proof had been demystified.²⁹⁴ On recovering his senses, Kyari wanted to attack but he was persuaded to wait until the following morning. Weak from his wounds and probably due to loss of blood, the Shehu agreed.

Informed by his scouts that the enemy was resting without much precaution, Rabih attacked and this met with little resistance. Kyari and a few of his followers attempted a gallant last stand. They drove off the attack several times. The Shehu's horse was killed under him, he was himself wounded a second time and his remount killed. He was

²⁹⁰ Babikir, 1950: 54.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Palmer, 1929: 25.

²⁹² Palmer, 1929: 26.

²⁹³ Kalle, 1919.

²⁹⁴ Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

captured along with Abba Masta Jikka and his brothers Abba Abana, Abba Mukhtar, Abba Masta, and Abba Taib.²⁹⁵ Rabih's soldiers pursued, harried, and killed the fleeing army with vengeance. Many more would have been killed but for Rabih's decision, on sighting the Arab looking corpse of Abba Beddowai b. Hajj Bashir, to give him a decent burial, thus slowing down the pursuit and killing.²⁹⁶

The captives were chained and taken to Gashagar. *Shehu* Kyari was interrogated by Rabih for three days without success as he "maintained an air of disdain and arrogance towards his captor"²⁹⁷ and refused to answer his captor's insistent query on why he killed Hashimi. Finally Kyari turned to the interpreter, Mabruk, and told him:²⁹⁸

As for my uncle it was my father's brother that I have killed not his. So why does he ask such questions? Tell this slave that if I had captured him I would not have wasted time in asking questions I would have had him killed immediately. This is no time for talk. Ask for no more. If he has anything to do then (let) him do it.

Shehu Kyari, who had earlier been cursed by *Magira* Ya Kéji,²⁹⁹ Hashimi's mother, for killing her son rather than Rabih, the enemy, had his throat cut like a sheep.³⁰⁰ His brothers who had been promised clemency on submission to the new regime also refused and were killed in like manner. Abba Masta Jikka submitted, was spared and served the

²⁹⁵ Alkali Bukar and Mala Abdu in Brenner Fieldnotes; Group Interview, *Shehu's Palace*, Maiduguri. 22.11.93; Mallam Abba Usman, 11.11.93.

²⁹⁶ Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnotes.

²⁹⁷ Adeleye, 1970a: 238.

²⁹⁸ Kalle, 1919.

²⁹⁹ The *Magira* had cursed *Shehu* Kyari, thus: "(May) your enemy Rabeh [...] slay you like a ram in the daylight for all to see", Alkali Bukar, Brenner Fieldnote.

³⁰⁰ Palmer, 1929: 26.

Rabih regime.³⁰¹

Most of the princes scattered and took off in different directions; including the children of *Shehu Ibrahim* who usually banded together. Umar Sanda along with Liman Abdurahman went to Damagaram.³⁰² Abba Bukar Garbai³⁰³ along with Abba Sanda Kyarimi, Abba Mallam b. Hashimi were captured and taken to Dikwa. Abba Sanda Mandarama and Yerima Aji went to Mandara while Abba Aji b. Abba Hamza and Abba Kassim b. Abba Masta went to Kano.³⁰⁴ Shettima Abdulkarim, Mustrema Abdul Nabi and many others were captured and went on to serve the Rabih regime.³⁰⁵

With the defeat of *Shehu Kyari* and the dispersal of the al-Kanemi princes, effective organised resistance was broken.

The Defeat of Sanda Wudaroma

A section of the surviving followers of *Shehu Kyari* followed his younger brother, Abba Sanda Limanrambe, to the Maiduguri area late in May 1894, and proclaimed him *Shehu*³⁰⁶ at Wudaro.³⁰⁷ This was the same region in which *Mallam Abu Gantur* operated. Perhaps this seemed to have been a determinant in their choice of the area. For the same

³⁰¹ He survived the regime to become the District Head of Konduga under British colonial rule.

³⁰² Abba Masta and Abba Ali in Brenner Fieldnotes.

³⁰³ Abba Bukar Garbai first fled to Kauwa before going to submit at Dikwa, Abba Ali, Brenner Fieldnotes.

³⁰⁴ Abba Masta, Brenner Fieldnotes.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ Kalle, 1919; Imam, 1974: 17.

³⁰⁷ From whence Sanda Limanrambe got his epithet Wudaroma. This is a common practice in Borno, for example, Mai Ali b. Idris (c.1571-1603) came to be known to history as Idris Alauma, on account of his having died and being buried near Lake Alau.

reason, it gave Rabih a cause for concern. Rabih had, with the defeat of *Shehu* Kyari and the dispersal of the al-Kanemi fugitives, remained in the Gashegar area to completely pacify the region and not give room for the enemy to regroup. From there he made a demonstration tour of western Borno, going as far as the Babur borderlands at Gotumba before moving north to Marguba, Damboa, and Gubgup, where Yerima Aji had attempted to quell the uprising of the Shuwa-Arabs before he was summoned to join the anti-Rabih coalition at Gumsa. Large numbers of the Shuwa-Arabs had gathered in this region and were raiding the Kanuri, Marghi, and Babur settlements. There were no important chiefs involved and they do not seem to have declared for Rabih either. It was a spontaneous reaction to the absence of authority in the area.³⁰⁸ With the arrival of Rabih the Shuwa-Arabs dispersed. Rabih moved some of them away from the area and settled them at Alau under his close observation.³⁰⁹

Shehu Sanda Wudaroma had meanwhile, hoped to move in and take Dikwa in Rabih's absence. Babikir, who had been left in charge of Dikwa, was preparing to move out and handle the situation when Rabih ordered him to remain on the defensive and sent in Gadim, commander of the seventh banner.³¹⁰ The encounter turned out to be a skirmish rather than a fierce battle as Sanda Wudaroma was easily overrun, losing thirty men and one hundred wounded compared to Gadim's four dead and seven wounded. The *Shehu* fled to Gumsuri Nyaleribe in the northern edge of Marghi country, where he was sheltered by the people of Wuyaram.³¹¹ Gadim sent Abdurahman Mabruk in pursuit of the *Shehu*. Sanda Wudaroma was defeated and taken prisoner at Shettima Ali Kolobe near Damboa.³¹²

³⁰⁸ For the Shuwa-Arabs negative attitude to central political authority, see Tijani, 1986: 62-73; Mohammed, 1997:1-9.

³⁰⁹ Lavers, 1977: 39.

³¹⁰ Kalle, 1919.

³¹¹ Imam, 1974: 17.

³¹² *Ibid.*; Kalle, 1919 gives this place as Gabrowa which Lavers,

The *Shehu*'s followers re-grouped and attacked Mabruk's column at night, killing forty of Rabih's men, with the aim of freeing the *Shehu* but they were repulsed with even more losses. Mabruk was despatched by Gadim with his prisoner to Rabih who was now at Karabiri. On their way, the inhabitants of Yajiwa were said to have booed the *Shehu* as he was taken through their town, either because of disenchantment and disillusionment with the al-Kanemi *Shehus* or to avoid a punitive expedition from Rabih.³¹³ *Shehu* Sanda Wudaroma was executed by Rabih at Karabiri.³¹⁴

The Failure of Resistance

With the defeat of Mallam Gantur, *Shehu* Kyari, and Sanda Wudaroma between January and May 1894, the whole of Borno lay docile before Rabih. Popular resistance had been crushed with the defeat of Gantur while the defeat of Kyari and Sanda Wudaroma closed the chapter on organised resistance. What, we may ask, accounts for the failure of the Borno resistance? The reasons for the failure are to be found in the causes for the fall of Borno to the invader. These include the deep-rooted and widening divisions within the al-Kanemi court, the inability of the al-Kanemi *Shehus* to seize the hour and co-ordinate their actions with those of *Mallam* Gantur, the enemy's military superiority in terms of fire-power, discipline and tactics, and the flight of most of the princes that survived the battle of Gashegar without remaining in metropolitan Borno to fight it out.

1977:38 translates to Nguburuwa.

³¹³ Imam, 1974: 17.

³¹⁴ Imam, 1974: 17 gives this place as Gashegar; Lavers, 1977: 38.

The popular resistance of *Mallam* Gantur owed its strength primarily to its spontaneity and millenarian appeal. This was responsible for its mass following. In this also lay its weakness. Spontaneity is antithetical to planned and co-ordinated action since it relies more on the spur of the moment as exemplified in the manner in which the rabble forces advanced towards Dikwa, and in the process burning Kulli, Mussene, and Marte, thereby alienating the inhabitants of those towns from their cause. It was a veritable mass suicide squad. It was a miracle that they defeated the first Rabih column under Aji Gambo. Second, though the millenarian appeal was important for mass mobilisation and recruitment of followers, its undefined nature and lack of co-ordination did not make for continuity, for immediately after the defeat and death of the leader, the group dispersed never to re-assemble. Leadership, because of the nature of the movement was necessarily individualistic and personalised. Therefore, the movement died with its leader.

Having arisen on the crest of its disgust and frustration with the inability of the legitimate leadership to successfully challenge the invader, no attempts were made to co-ordinate their efforts with those of the al-Kanemi nobility organising similar resistance in the neighbourhood of Geidam. The dilatoriness of the al-Kanemi nobles, five months having elapsed since the sack of Kukawa, seemed to have further convinced the Gantur partisans that the al-Kanemi dynasts could not be relied upon to provide the leadership necessary to liberate Borno. The inability or unwillingness of the two groups to provide a common front allowed Rabih to take them on one after the other with disastrous consequences.

The military superiority of the enemy was an important factor in the defeat of both movements. Gantur led a rabble of virtually un-armed followership, pushed into action by their enthusiasm, belief in their invisibility, invincibility, and fervent nationalism, amounting in the circumstances to religious over-zealousness. It was,

therefore, easy for Rabih to deal with a poorly armed and untrained force, no matter how determined and enthusiastic. Their enthusiasm could not match the fire-power, tactical superiority, and discipline of Rabih's tested veterans. Even in the better organised resistance led by *Shehu Kyari*, the superior fire-power and discipline of the enemy ultimately decided the battle. The Borno army was based essentially on the elite cavalry force; Rabih on the other hand relied primarily on an infantry armed with modern and superior fire-power disciplined along European lines. The switch from the cavalry to a better armed infantry was not peculiar to Borno, it was a development clearly manifest in most parts of Africa in the closing years of the nineteenth century,³¹⁵ only that it took Rabih to introduce it to Borno.

In both resistance movements, military skills, fire-power, discipline and experience gave the battle to the invader. It was easy for Rabih to overrun the hordes of Gantur's followers, most of whom were tasting battle for the first time. Even in the case of *Shehu Kyari*, the enemy's careful planning in making provision for lines of retreat and point of convergence as illustrated by its ability to check its army in flight, re-group, and counter-attack, gave them the edge over Kyari's undisciplined forces that fell on the enemy's camp and started looting and celebrating on the first signs of victory without following it up to rout the fleeing army. Furthermore, Rabih's stern discipline as shown by the punishment meted out to his three banner commanders, who were adjudged to have failed in their assigned tasks leading to their initial defeat between the two encounters, showed his good command and grip on his troops.

The semblance of unity apparent at Gumsa, following the bringing together of all the three different power blocs of the al-Kanemi house and their followers on the eve of the battle of Gashegar did not last past the battle-

³¹⁵ Ajayi, 1989: 782.

field, if indeed it lasted till the end of the battle. This is because most of the *Abbauwa* and *Kogunawa* that survived the encounter took off for neighbouring states even before the last shots were fired. It was only the surviving followers of *Shehu* Kyari that made an attempt, albeit feeble, but an attempt any way, to challenge the enemy after Gashegar, as shown by their stand at Wudaro.

There is no indication in the extant sources that the people of Borno were, apart from their nationalistic desire to rid their state of the invader, enthusiastic supporters of the decadent leadership. The refusal of the inhabitants of Borsari to shelter *Shehu* Hashimi after his flight from Kukawa,³¹⁶ and the derogatory manner in which the captured *Shehu* Sanda Wudaroma was treated by the people of Yajiwa³¹⁷ indicate the gulf existing between them and their rulers. A gulf created and sustained by decades of oppression, extortionate taxation, worsening economic conditions, and the general indifference of the rulers to their plight.³¹⁸

The reaction of the Shuwa-Arabs in either openly siding with the invader or revolting against the al-Kanemi authority since the battle of Amja is another indication of this widening gulf. *Shaykh* Muhammad al-Kanemi had himself come to power largely with the support of the Shuwa-Arabs and the Kanembu living on the shores of Lake Chad.³¹⁹ For this reason, the Shuwa-Arabs enjoyed a favoured status in Borno under Muhammad al-Kanemi. It was as a result of the demise of the Sayfawa court and the incorporation of some of the Sayfawa courtiers into the al-Kanemi lineage over the years that the Shuwa-Arabs came to lose that favoured status. Even the Kanembu spearmen, who formed the backbone of al-Kanemi's army, had come to disavow their masters as they were said to be the very first

³¹⁶ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 23: Mobber District Notebook.

³¹⁷ Imam, 1974: 17.

³¹⁸ See pp. 12-20 above.

³¹⁹ Tijani, 1985: 65.

people to plunder Kukawa after the flight of Hashimi.³²⁰

This ill-feeling towards the ruling class, especially the latter-day al-Kanemi and their *kogunawa* was not lost on them as most of them fled out of Borno, having no faith in the people of Borno to provide them safe haven internally, not to talk of organising another resistance, even if they intended to. The few of them that remained behind like Abba Bukar Garbai at Kauwa went in and submitted at Dikwa.

In the final analysis it was the lack of co-ordination between the various groups, the widening gulf between the rulers and the ruled, and the military superiority, discipline and experience of the enemy that were responsible for the failure of the resistance movements in Borno.

³²⁰ Interview, Mallam Abba Usman, 10.11.93.

Chapter Four

Emergence of the Rabih State

The Nature of the State

The Borno polity had been organized on state basis for over a thousand years.³²¹ Both the al-Kanemi, and its predecessor, Sayfawa states were based on clearly discernible constitutional frameworks with sovereign powers, both *de jure* and *de facto*, in the hands of the al-Kanemi *Shehu* and the Sayfawa *Mai* and their *majlis* and *nokuna*.³²² The Rabih state was, however, unlike any of its predecessors, a military dictatorship *par excellence* - as the *Amir*³²³ and his military clique in the *Zubat al-Kubar*, the military council - had an unbridled domination of the instruments of power and coercion.³²⁴ This state exhibited all the features of a military dictatorship.³²⁵ First, the use of state power was arbitrary and exclusive. Power was monopolised by the *Amir* as manifested by the "absence of division of power" and the suppression of competing, legitimate political and social groups in the state. Second, the abolition of the constitutional apparatus of state power as shown by the complete abrogation of the "juridical bonds of political power" and its substitution with martial law. The whole state became a vast military camp where the *Amir* and

³²¹ Smith, 1971: 165.

³²² For a comparative analysis of the Sayfawa and al-Kanemi constitutional frameworks see, Tijani, 1983: 130-4.

³²³ Rabih, though "elected" as *Amir* by his followers in 1879, has been referred to as such in many works. He seemed to have referred to himself as both *Amir* and *Shaykh*. In his correspondence with Khalifa Abdallah he used the term *Shaykh*. See SGA, Nujumu Letter Book, item 6, Rabih Fadullula to Khalifa Abdullah b. as-Sayyid Muhammad, 4th Shawal 1305 A.H./June 14, 1888.

³²⁴ Stammer, 1968: 161-8.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

his subordinates punished their conquered subjects in a military fashion. Third, the complete abrogation of civil liberties as every person in the state was seen as the *Amir's* slave, and treated as such. Fourth, the basically whimsical, impulsive and aggressive nature of decision-making. Fifth, the intimidation, terror and/or the threat of it, used in the enforcement of compliance. The coercive instruments of the state thus became the most important element of state administration.

In part because of the way and manner in which the state was acquired and the imposition of an alien rule over an established state with developed political and bureaucratic structures and, in part, due to the nature of the Rabih army and its sudden transformation from an efficient war machine to an administrative apparatus, the civil and military administration of the state were not clearly differentiated. The military commanders became the chief fief holders (*Chima Kura*), assisted by local rulers who had submitted to the new state, holding fort in their localities. Neither the *Amir* nor any of his commanders had any formal or practical training, or were prepared in any way, for the task of administering an old state with established constitutional structure such as Borno. The bureaucrats of the new state still remained the managers of the efficient war machine of the slave procurer and, therefore, saw the state as another legitimate field for plunder and harvest. For the organisation of state and its efficient management was beyond the competence of Rabih and his marauding forces. The *Amir*, therefore, still remained a military commander rather than a statesman. This accounts for the substantial acceptance of the al-Kanemi mode of fief administration with little modification by Rabih.

Central Administration

Rabih as the commander-in-chief of the army was the head of state. His powers were unlimited and he did not hesitate to use them. The transition from what Hodgkin termed the "mobile empire"³²⁶ to a settled state was not only gradual but embryonic as at the defeat of the state by the French in 1900.

Rabih organized the state he seized from the al-Kanemi dynasty by conquest to suit his needs. He instituted a system of indirect rule which combined limited local autonomy for the subjected local headmen with alien central control. Those of the al-Kanemi provincial rulers and *kogunawa* who had submitted to him were allowed to keep and administer their fiefs and territorial holdings under the close supervision of his military commanders settled at Dikwa.³²⁷

The *Amir* was assisted by the *Zubat al-Kubar* whose civil functions, apart from its members being absentee landlords, are not quite clear. Prior to the conquest of Borno and settlement at Dikwa, decision-making was seemingly collective as indicated by the election of Rabih as *Amir* in 1879, and the apparently collective decision not to make the *hijra* to Omdurman as requested by *Khalifa Abdallah* in 1886.³²⁸ This was long before they became saddled with civil administration, but since they were often consulted on military matters, it is not out of place to assume that their advice might have been sought on civil matters, too. Faki Ahmad al-Kabir and Arbab Babikir wad Hamad, for instance, were two prominent banner commanders whose advice were often sought by the *Amir*. Babikir was so close to and trusted by Rabih that he was

³²⁶ Hodgkin, 1960: 45.

³²⁷ Gentil, 1902: 237.

³²⁸ Sudan Government Archives, Khartoum, Nujumu Letter Book, item 6, Rabih Fadullula to Khalifa Abdallah, 4th Shawal 1305 A.H./June 14, 1888.

said to be the only one who had unrestricted access to him at all times.³²⁹ With the increase of the banners to twenty-nine at Dikwa, Fadl-Allah and Muhammad Nyebe, his sons, also joined this council. Whatever the functions of the *Zubat al-Kubar* were, it must be emphasised that Rabih had the final say on all matters both civil and military as exemplified by the stern measures he took against three of his banner commanders at the battle of Gashegar; in the case of Fadl-Allah, in spite of the intercession and against the advice of his other colleagues.³³⁰

Rabih's authoritarianism and dictatorial disposition and tendencies are widely acclaimed by both his admirers and adversaries largely because he took the administration of justice upon himself. Summary executions and the sale of debtors to slave dealers to recover the cost in default were some of his common judicial pronouncements.³³¹ It was not until 1895 that he was convinced of the need to administer some form of justice. The fervent desire to be seen and accepted as a good Muslim, the need for social control in the administration of Dikwa as a city-state, the intervention of the al-Kanemi *kogunawa* who had submitted to him,³³² and who had some idea of the administration of justice based on the principles of the *Shari'a*, and probably the influence of Hayatu b. Sai'd, also seemed to have convinced Rabih to set up a court, the only one in the state, at Dikwa. This court was presided over by Alkali al-Madani,³³³ a Jallaba who had

³²⁹ Julien, 1925.

³³⁰ Babikir, 1950: 54.

³³¹ Hallam, 1977: 197; Interview, Alhaji Grema Bukar, May 25, 1993.

³³² Abba Ali, Brenner Fieldnotes. This informant was himself an al-Kanemi *Koguna* who had also served Rabih at Dikwa.

³³³ Babikir [1950: 62]; Salem El-Mutawi to Zubair Pasha, June 23, 1895, *Egyptian Intelligence Report* no 39, June 1895. Hallam [1977: 197] and fn mentions one Alhaji Muhammad though he also mentions al-Madani and thinks one may be a surname. The local sources remember only one al-Madani as *Alkali* and one *Alkali Narjin* as adviser to Fadl Allah,

lived in Kukawa before the occupation.³³⁴ Though the court was allowed some leverage to adjudicate on so many issues, the *Amir* also handled and passed judgements on cases that came before him based on his whims and caprices, rather than any laid down procedure, and certainly not the *Shari'a*.³³⁵ A good example was the case of Aisa Mainaram, a young girl who had refused to marry despite the insistence of her elders to do so, when the case got to Rabih, he gave her out in marriage to Razak-Allah, the commander of his bodyguard regiment, without her consent.³³⁶

Reference has been made to the inexperience and, indeed, the inability of Rabih and his banner commanders in civil administration. This realisation coupled with the desire to effectively control the conquered state at minimum cost, the arrival of some influential al-Kanemi title-holders at his court, and the political expediency of continuity compelled Rabih to opt for a modified *chima* system of fief administration. There was some element of continuity in the administration of Borno under the various dynasties, in that whatever their differences, they all utilised the *chima* mode of fief administration. The al-Kanemi state inherited this system, though with substantial modifications, from the Sayfawa *Mais*.³³⁷ For an understanding of the Rabih state, it is necessary to briefly discuss the *chima* system of territorial and national administration in the immediate pre-Rabih period.

Under the al-Kanemi *Shehus* the *chima* system was used as a means of, first, rewarding loyal *kogunawa*, *abbawa*, *nanawa*, the *ulama*, and any other person(s) by the *Shehu*. These titled officials and important personages either lived in the areas allotted to them, or lived at the

probably after the death of Rabih. Abba Ali, Brenner Fieldnotes.

³³⁴ Abba Ali, Brenner Fieldnotes.

³³⁵ Cf. Babikir, 1950: 62.

³³⁶ This information was related to Hallam by the woman involved, Aisa Mainaram, in 1966 [1977:197].

³³⁷ Tijani, 1983: 127 ff.

capital, and subsisted on their fiefs. Second, the system served as a means of frontier defence and administration by establishing frontier garrisons and settling military commanders, especially those of servile status, mostly *kachellawa*. The frontier fiefs were usually consolidated and larger than those of other fief-holders, and almost invariably established in those frontiers liable to encroachment by external powers. Third, as a vehicle for integrating the periphery to the centre thereby not only effectively administering but also giving the peoples of the outlying areas a sense of belonging. Fourth, as a means of administering groups and nationalities with distinct social, political, and different economic needs, like the pastoral Shuwa-Arabs, Kanembu, and the Fulata.

The concept of the *chima* is based on the understanding that all land belongs to the sovereign. He could parcel out a portion to any person to be administered for and on his behalf. Every *chima*, therefore, was an administrator of his estate and did so, on behalf of the *Shehu*. Some fiefs over time became attached to some offices and therefore became hereditary like the offices to which they were attached. Most *chimawa*, however, held their fiefs for a life time, which on their death reverted to the *Shehu* for re-assignment to another person, within or outside his family.³³⁸ A *chima* could be divested of his fief in one of two ways: sell it in his life time or through outright revocation by the sovereign.

There were two grades of *chima*, the *Chima Kura* (senior *chima*) and *Chima Gana* (junior *chima*). The *Chima Kura* was usually an absentee landlord to whom the fief was allocated in the first instance and was resident in the capital. His liege, the *Chima Gana*, lived in and administered the fief on his behalf. The powers of the *Chima Gana* in his fief were wide and practically unlimited. However, his main duties were the collection of taxes and tribute and their onward transmission to the centre. His

³³⁸ Alkali, 1983: 116.

other functions include the raising of an army when demanded by the *Shehu*, maintenance of law and order, and general administration and good governance of his fief.³³⁹ Only severe cases and cases of unusual importance, such as homicide were referred to the capital. Territorial defence and war were the only matters on which the *Chima Gana* reported directly to the *Shehu*.³⁴⁰ All other cases were treated and disposed of by the *Chima Gana*. Except in the frontier garrisons where the fiefs were large and consolidated, all other fiefs were randomly scattered throughout the state and rarely contiguous. This was built-in to forestall the emergence of a very powerful and ambitious *chima* who might challenge the central authority. A fief usually varied from a single village unit to a whole district. As at the end of *Shehu Hashimi's* rule in 1893, Borno was divided into 524 fiefs under 104 *Chima Kura*.³⁴¹

There were two types of *chimawa*: the *Chima Cidibe* (territorial fief-holder) and the *Chima Jilibe* (clan or tribal fief-holder). The *Chima Jilibe*, like his *Chima Kura* counterpart, was also resident in the capital. He had the status of a *Chima Kura* and was the representative of the clan or nationality he represented at the court. He must not necessarily be, and was rarely, a member of the group he represented. This office was of importance among the pastoral groups because of the peculiarities of their social organisation and economic needs. In any case, all the sedentary peoples were administered through the *Chima Cidibe* system. In both cases, their basic functions remained the same. This system of fief administration apart from providing a means of sustenance to its holders, also allowed for some co-ordination between the centre and its constituent units for a smooth running of the state.

³³⁹ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc.17: Borsari District, Vol. 1, 1928 J.R. Patterson.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ NAK, SNP 10, 63p/1915: Bornu Province December Quarter Report, 1915; SNP 17, K. 2041/1916: Borsari District Assessment Report.

The Rabih administration of state was similar in form, if not in content, with the al-Kanemi state.³⁴² The fiefs under Rabih were invariably larger and more compact than those of his predecessors. For instance, the units of Magumeri and Konduga previously consisting of six and seven fiefs were reduced to two and four respectively.³⁴³ As mentioned earlier, the *chima* system as adopted by Rabih was basically used as an indirect way of administering a conquered people by an alien ruler through their own local representatives. Their loyalty was secured by force and maintained by the threat of, and often, the use of it. It was, therefore, a careful and balanced combination of local autonomy, at least for the local potentate and centralised political control from Dikwa.

The absentee-landlords under Rabih were almost all invariably members of the *Zubat al-Kubar* whose loyalty to the regime was not in doubt. For this purpose Rabih grouped the conquered territory under local headmen who held the title of *lawan* (village head) with authority over numerous settlements. Most of these *lawanwa* had served the previous regime in the same capacity and had submitted to the new dispensation. Those among them who proved contumacious like Fugu Aduwula of Kauwa and Fugu Musa of Badu were summarily executed.³⁴⁴ Unlike under the al-Kanemi dynasty, Rabih grouped village units under the *lawan* in "homologous geographical units".³⁴⁵ Though under Rabih this system was used purely for control and the maximum mobilisation of resources in the form of taxes and tribute, the local headmen seemed to have checked the plunders, banditry and depredations of Rabih's soldiers to

³⁴² NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 17: Borsari District, Patterson.

³⁴³ NAK, Maiprof. 264/1919: Special Report on Magumeri District, G.C. Whiteley, A.D.O.; NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 37: Konduga District Notebook, Vol. 1.

³⁴⁴ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 25: Kanembu District Notebook; NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 17: Nganzai District Notebook, Vol. 3, 1938.

³⁴⁵ NAK, Maiprof.4, D.1, Vol. 3: Report on Konduga District 1916, G.J.F. Tomlinson.

some extent.

Prominent among the al-Kanemi fief holders who submitted early were Abba Sanda Laminumi and *Kachella Abdullahi Ali Marghi*. Abba Sanda Laminumi, son of the infamous Laminu Njitiya, was the fief holder for most of Magumeri under *Shehu Hashimi*. He fought Rabih at all the battles including Gashegar but submitted afterwards. He was allowed to hold an enlarged East Magumeri fief where he had some traditional followership as *Chima Gana* under *Shaykh Dahab*, commander of the eleventh banner, as overseer at Dikwa.³⁴⁶ *Kachella Abdullahi Ali Marghi* was, under Hashimi, the second largest fief-holder after the *Magira*. He controlled the fifteen consolidated fiefs of Gujba and fifteen others scattered throughout the state including the important military garrisons of Lantaiwa and Biriri.³⁴⁷ He fled and took refuge in Marghi country after the battle of Gashegar but later resurfaced and submitted, after two summons from Rabih. He was allowed to continue to control his former fiefs at Gujba with additional responsibility for the fiefs of Bara, Borsari, and Nainawa.³⁴⁸ Not as prominent as either of the two mentioned above but a successful early submission was that of Lawan Muhammad of Lawanti. He submitted at Duchi, probably after the defeat of *Shehu Kyari*, and was made the local ruler of "practically all the country from Komadugu Gana to the Bedde border".³⁴⁹

Provincial Administration

The provinces were the areas that needed administering in the real sense following the despoliation,

³⁴⁶ NAK, Maiprof.4, 264/1919: Special Report on Magumeri District, G.C. Whiteley, A.D.O.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid*; Maiprof.4, Acc. 20: Gujba District Notebook.

³⁴⁸ NAK, Maiprof.4, 264/1919: Special Report on Magumeri District, G.C. Whiteley, A.D.O.

³⁴⁹ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 12: Borsari District, Vol.2, 1930.

ravages and mass population movements that accompanied the conquest and pacification of Borno. It was ingenious of Rabih to have lured back and re-absorbed the strong local headmen into his administration, and allowed them to continue to rule their territories under the close supervision of his loyal banner commanders. The likes of *Kachella* Abdullahi Ali Marghi, Abba Sanda Laminumi, and *Kachella* Yusuf of Ngurno had family histories of ruling their territories dating back to Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi; and in the case of *Kachella* Abdullahi Ali Marghi, to the Sayfawa dynasty.³⁵⁰ This had the effect of keeping the local peoples under control at less cost, without necessarily showing any continuous armed presence in the province while providing some semblance of continuity, if not legitimacy, to the new regime and ensuring the security of the areas.

The provinces were administered in two ways: territorially as in the case of the *chima cidibe* and ethnically as in the *chima jilibe* system. The hitherto scattered and fragmented fiefs were enlarged and consolidated for ease of control, governance, and taxation.³⁵¹ The fiefs under Rabih were so large and contiguous that the whole of Nganzai, with the exception of three settlements, were given as a single fief to Gadim,³⁵² most of Magumeri was allocated to *Shaykh* Dahab,³⁵³ Konduga to Taha,³⁵⁴ Maiduguri to Fadl-Allah,³⁵⁵ while Lumburam, Bagara and most of north-eastern Borno went to Babikir.³⁵⁶ The Kare-Kare of the western marches

³⁵⁰ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 20: Gujba District Notebook;

Maiprof.4, 264/1919: Special Report on Magumeri District.

³⁵¹ NAK, SNP 10 63p/1915: Bornu Province December Quarter 1915; SNP 17, K. 2041: Borsari District Assessment Report.

³⁵² NAK, Maiprof. 4, D 16: Report of Nganzai District.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ NAK, Maiprof. 4, 264/1919: Special Report on Magumeri District.

³⁵⁵ NAK, Maiprof. 4, D. 1 Vol 4: Special Report on Konduga District.

³⁵⁶ Babikir, 1950: 61-2.

were divided almost equally between Tokoloma and Abba Shaib.³⁵⁷ All these *chimawa* were banner commanders and resident at Dikwa. In the case of Rabih, the need for the maintenance of internal security and the desire to put parcels of land only into the hands of most trusted officials accounted for the enlargement of the fiefs.

The pastoral peoples, who had different needs and demands from the state from those of the settled population were, under Rabih as in the preceding regime, placed under the *chima jilibe*. The four different sectors of the Fulata Mare in the Monguno-Mandala region were all grouped and placed under Maina Gumsumi in c. 1898.³⁵⁸ Their counterpart, the *Abore* Fulata, living between Birni Gazargamu and Shani to the west, managed to survive Rabih's depredations and rule untouched.³⁵⁹

The Shuwa-Arabs, Rabih's first allies in the area, were administered directly by *chimawa* resident at Dikwa, overseeing *lawanwa* who controlled groups of Shuwa-Arabs. Prior to the advent of Rabih each Shuwa-Arab group followed its own *sheikh* but Rabih grouped fractions of the same tribe under a chief known as *nader* (pl. *nudara*). This new grouping, according to Zeltner, had a dual effect: first, it imposed peace on factions of the same group formerly in stiff competition one with another; and second, it gave the group a cohesion and sense of importance it had never known before.³⁶⁰ On top of the *nadir*, Rabih introduced the *lawan* as an office that supervised numerous *nudara*. This modification, for example, allowed Lawan Mandilqa of Koma, of the Awlad Sulayman in Balge, become *Lawan* of the Bani Salamat while Umar Abu Gawiye of the Awlad Mahareb in Manawaki became the overall *Chima Jilibe Kura* of the Awlad Ghawalme (K. Kwalme) and Awlad Hamed.³⁶¹ *Lawan*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ NAK, Maiprof 4, Acc. 24: Monguno District Notebook, 1924.

³⁵⁹ Geidam, 1991: 180.

³⁶⁰ Zeltner, 1967: 86 ff.

³⁶¹ Zeltner, 1967: 89; NAK, SNP 15 Acc. 215: The Shuwa Arabs in Bornu.

Mandilqa was the most powerful of the Shuwa-Arab *lawanwa*. He apart from being the head of the most prominent Shuwa-Arab group was, along with Umar Abu Gawiye, the first to join Rabih at Logone.³⁶² He holds the first place in Shuwa-Arab hierarchy; followed by Umar Abu Gawiye of the Ghawalme, the Ghawalme being the largest Shuwa-Arab group to the west of Lake Chad.³⁶³

All the *lawanwa* were settled in their localities around Dikwa and were expected to attend the obligatory Friday congregational prayer there and pay homage to the *Amir* every week. The friendly Shuwa-Arabs in and around the capital not only served as a source of security but also served as a ready reservoir for conscription into the army, should the need arise.

Rabih, however, combined the appointment of strong, loyal, and influential local leaders with the sale of titles and offices. Three Shuwa-Arab *sheikhs* of the Awlad Salim in Yele, namely, Hussaini, Alfaro, and Usman wad Ali bought their offices from Rabih.³⁶⁴ The Manga, like the Horewalde Fulata, massively voted with their feet. Most of them settled in Damagaram and did not return until the defeat of Rabih and the imposition of colonial rule.³⁶⁵ Those of them that remained behind, banded together under the leadership of *Kachella* Abdu Buji Kolomi and declared themselves independent of any power, including Rabih, and were said to have wrought as much havoc in northern Borno as Rabih.³⁶⁶

³⁶² Zeltner, 1867: 86.

³⁶³ Zeltner, 1967: 88; Babikir, 1950: 62.

³⁶⁴ NAK, Maiprof. 4, Acc. 24: Monguno District Notebook, 1921. Inclosure, "The Shuwa Arabs" by G.J.F. Tomlinson.

³⁶⁵ NAK, Bornu Province Report no.3 of 28 February 1903. Resident W. P. Hewby.

³⁶⁶ Geidam, 1991: 176.

The Shuwa-Arabs were, in 1894, grouped in the following order for the purposes of administration.³⁶⁷

Table Three: Administration of Shuwa Arab Groups

Clan Group	Lawan	Chima Jilib Kura
Ghawalme	Lawan Dalil ³⁶⁸	Umar Abu Gawiye
Awlad Hamed	Lawan Nur	Umar Abu Gawiye
Bani Salamat	Lawan Mandilqa	Sururu Zangi
Bani Seit	Bukar Kalama	Ahmad wad Brahim
Iesiye	Lawan Abu Kordo	Shoko
Ma'in	Umar wad Ngurdori	Abd es-Sit

Other groups like the Sugurti-Kanembu were similarly administered through their own local headmen. Thus, the Munbu-Dilewa section of the Sugurti living in the Ngurno-Kekeno-Yoyo axis and the corridor extending as far as Kangarwa were placed under *Kachella Yusuf* of Ngurno.³⁶⁹ The Salewa section of the Sugurti at Kauwa were administered by *Fugu Kyari Aduwulami*, whose power and influence extended to as far as Chesa'a and beyond to N'guigmi in modern Niger Republic.³⁷⁰

The administration of the provinces was basically left

³⁶⁷ NAK, SNP 15 Acc. 215: The Shuwa Arabs in Bornu.

³⁶⁸ Lawan Dalil was later replaced by Lawan Nyerku. Not much is known of Lawan Dalil but it is probable that he was the *Lamdo* of the sub-emirate of Pette who allied with Hayatu b. Sai'd when Mandara attacked and threatened its sovereignty in c. 1882. It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that Lawan Dalil may have followed Hayatu to Bornu when the latter allied with Rabih and settled at Dikwa after the destruction of Balda, his stronghold, by Lamido Zubairu of Fombina in c. 1892. It seems either Lawan Dalil died in the Hayatu-Fadl Allah skirmish, fled, or was removed for doubtful loyalty. See Abubakar, 1977: 132-8.

³⁶⁹ NAK, Maiprof. 4, Acc. 25: Kanembu District Notebook.

³⁷⁰ Interview, Maina Mustafa, December 29, 1993; NAK, Maiprof. 4, Acc. 25: Kanembu District Notebook.

in the hands of the local rulers who had submitted, as they were required to continue to govern their provinces and collect and transmit taxes to Rabih at the capital. Where local rulers proved difficult to deal with, they were executed and in most cases attempts were made to find replacements within their families. Kauwa is a good example, *Fugu Aduwula*, the headman of Kauwa on the advent of Rabih, was accused of sheltering some fugitives of the al-Kanemi dynasty. When asked to send them to Dikwa, he refused arguing that they were his guests. Rabih not only took the fugitives but also executed *Fugu Aduwula*, and in his place appointed his son, *Fugu Kyari Aduwulami*, in c. 1895.³⁷¹

The Economy

The Bornu economy in the nineteenth century was highly integrated into the economy of the sub-region, and had substantial links with the trans-Saharan trade. Though the economy was distressed in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, due basically to a decline in the resources accruing to the state and the low demand for Bornu's export items like ivory, ostrich feathers, and especially slaves, in the markets of North Africa and Europe, the local trade was substantial enough to sustain the state. Paul Lovejoy has revealed that, though trade across the Sahara was important, it was still secondary and far behind the regional trade in importance throughout the nineteenth century.³⁷² It was, therefore, neither lack of performance of the economy nor decline in the trans-Saharan trade but the increasing demands made on the people by the ruling class and an ever widening lineage of *abbawa*, *nanawa*, *kogunawa*, and their dependants living off the state, that produced a semblance of economic crisis in the 1880s and

³⁷¹ Interview, Maina Mustafa, December 29, 1993; NAK, Maiprof. 4, Acc. 25: Kanembu District Notebook.

³⁷² Lovejoy, 1984: 86-109.

1890s, responsible for the mass disaffection with the ruling class.³⁷³

Agriculture remained the basic economic activity and mainstay of the economy. Most people earned their living from the land. All other economic activities such as trade, crafts, and manufacture were secondary and practised as adjuncts to agriculture, often on a seasonal and part-time basis. In fact, it was the surplus from agriculture that made it possible to finance other types of enterprise, especially trade. Although agriculture was peasant-based, there was an efficient and well organized market system. There existed an incipient merchant class and a well developed foreign one, with an embryonic capital, in the North African trading community at Kukawa. These traders were mostly financed by Jews resident at Tripoli.³⁷⁴ This link with North Africa and Europe had laid the basis of integration into the international economy.³⁷⁵ This was the economy Rabih seized from the al-Kanemi rulers of Borno in 1893.

The basic economic objectives and pre-occupation of the Rabih state, like any state of its nature, established by conquest and maintained with force, were primarily to (I) maximally appropriate and utilize the state's economic and manpower resources to make for the continuous implementation of the ruler's fluid and ever changing economic policies; (II) the continuous regulation and control of economic activity by the ruler and the desire not to allow the emergence of any independent economic group that may challenge the ruler's monopoly over the economy; and (III) the need to maintain political control over the various interest groups in the society through the manipulation of various economic policies. These were usually through a combination of taxation, promotion of state enterprise, forced labour and various economic and monetary

³⁷³ See Chapter one above.

³⁷⁴ PRO, FO 101/84, Africa no.3, Alfred Dickson to FO, Tripoli, April 12, 1894.

³⁷⁵ Hopkins, 1975: 78.

policies.³⁷⁶

Taxation and Revenue

Revenue mobilisation and foreign trade engaged Rabih's attention more than any other economic activity in his administration of Borno. Both were important and central to his continuous sojourn in Borno and the survival of his state: he needed the enormous resources accruing from taxation to maintain his troops, acquire new weapons and gunpowder, service old ones, and conduct trade beyond Borno; he needed foreign trade to service his insatiable demand for military supplies and the export of slaves, an item for which he had an inexhaustible supply. This alone would guarantee his position economically and end his political isolation by the neighbouring states, so as to secure his hold on Borno.

Tax collection was the single most important domestic pre-occupation of the Rabih state for the whole period of its existence. The maximum mobilisation of resources and its use without commitment to traditional aristocratic groups, and the desire to exhaust these resources, are a feature of all states acquired and maintained by force.³⁷⁷ The Rabih state more than any other in the Central Sudan demonstrated this.

Booty and loot from the plunder of the populace were initially deposited at the treasury, *Bayt al-Mal*, before being divided equally between Rabih and the troops.³⁷⁸ By 1895, a formal system of capitation tax had been imposed, each individual was levied a tax of one Maria Theresa dollar, though much more was collected by the agents.³⁷⁹ In many instances, grains and gowns were also collected by the local

³⁷⁶ Eisentadt, 1969: 121 ff.

³⁷⁷ Eisentadt, 1968: 45.

³⁷⁸ Everett, 1898; Babikir, 1950: 63.

³⁷⁹ Everett, 1898.

headmen escorted by a detachment of armed soldiers.³⁸⁰ However, it is not certain whether this capitation tax became an annual tax, as in later years the various fiefs were assessed various sums of money to be paid annually.

This tax was so heavy, and its method of collection so brutal and high-handed, that the Koyam of Nganzai rebelled and killed Sugur, the *Chima Gana* of Gadim in c. 1896.³⁸¹ This, of course, met with heavy reprisals as virtually all Koyam herds were seized and driven to Dikwa, in addition to the execution of over a hundred of the rebel leaders.³⁸²

Taxation of the pastoralists was different from that of the sedentary peoples. *Jangal*, the livestock tax, was first imposed in 1894 at the rate of one cattle and two Maria Theresa dollars per every twenty head of cattle. On this occasion many thousands of cattle evaded the count and payment of the tax.³⁸³ As a result, Rabih rounded up the herds, confiscated half, and levied a tax of one in every ten head of cattle on the rest.³⁸⁴ In 1895, all the herds were ordered to graze in the dry season pastures of Fada to the north-east of Dikwa, a measure which made it very difficult to evade the count. This time, one head and two Maria Theresa dollars were collected on every ten head of cattle. Having thus acquired a good knowledge of the Shuwa-Arab wealth in cattle, each Shuwa-Arab group was assessed a fixed sum of money to be paid annually. The highest single assessment for any one group was 40,000 Maria Theresa dollars, though it is believed that about fifty per cent more

³⁸⁰ NAK, Maiprof.4, D.1 Vol. 4: Special Report on Konduga District, J.D. Hardford, A.D.O. June 15, 1927.

³⁸¹ NAK, Maiprof.4, Acc. 16; Nganzai District Notebook, Vol.2, 1938.

³⁸² NAK, Maiprof.4, D 16; Special Report on Nganzai District, G.J.F. Tomlinson, 1918.

³⁸³ NAK, SNP 15, Acc. 215: "The Shuwa-Arabs in Bornu, their history, characteristics and traditions", G.J.F. Lethem, November 19, 1917, Appendix A.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

was taken in by the collectors for themselves.³⁸⁵ The sedentary Shuwa-Arabs engaged in agriculture were levied four *saa*³⁸⁶ of corn per adult male.³⁸⁷ We are not certain whether this applied to the other sedentary peoples of Borno but it is very likely since a combination of cash payment, corn tax and clothing were reported taken in "large quantities" at Konduga.³⁸⁸

The Fulata, another cattle rich pastoral group, emigrated from Borno *en masse* with the advent of Rabih. Most of them settled in the region of Burmi.³⁸⁹ They returned in 1896, probably due to heavy demands on them by *Mallam* Jibril Gaini of Burmi, and were made to pay a large indemnity. The Horewalde Fulata in the Dabalam area were collectively taxed one hundred head of cattle and twelve horses every year.³⁹⁰ The Abore Fulata escaped Rabih's exactions.³⁹¹ It is not certain what happened to the Fulata Mare of the Monguno-Mandala area, but they must have been taxed as a *Chima Gana* was appointed for them in c. 1898.³⁹²

The Koyam and Magumi Furibe had virtually all of their cattle and camels seized because they supported the resistance led by *Mallam* Abu Gantur and killed Sugur, Gadim's representative.³⁹³ It seems they were left alone after that as there was nothing left to be taxed, for as one source puts it, even the clothes on the people's backs were removed and taken away.³⁹⁴

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ A *saa* weighs 25 lbs.

³⁸⁷ NAK, SNP 15, Acc.215: The Shuwa-Arabs in Bornu.

³⁸⁸ NAK, Maiprof.4, D.I Vol. 4: Special Report on Konduga District.

³⁸⁹ Lavers, 1972: 5.

³⁹⁰ Stenning, 1959: 98.

³⁹¹ Zeltner, 1967: 88; NAK, SNP 15, Acc.215: The Shuwa-Arabs in Bornu.

³⁹² Zeltner, 1967: 86.

³⁹³ NAK, Maiprof.4, D.16: Report of Nganzai District.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Half of the revenue that went to Rabih was used for the upkeep of his large palace, the maintenance, equipping and establishment of provisioning stations for the army, the administration of Dikwa, and the provision of public works. The tax system was very efficient but exacting and extortionate on the people. There were reports of properties of a whole village being carted away,³⁹⁵ and of elders of a village being held to ransom to be released on the payment of the sum demanded.³⁹⁶ This heavy taxation, and the unorthodox mode of collection, in addition to his dictatorial rule, accounts in large part for the odium in which Rabih's name is still held in Borno.

Agriculture

The economy was, apart from the people themselves, the greatest casualty of Rabih's invasion and occupation of Borno. The agricultural sector was the worst hit. The direct destruction of crops and the plunder of the populace apart, the mass displacement of people and the attendant fear, insecurity, and uncertainty engendered by the conquest and reinforced by the continuous raids of pacification, did not allow for agricultural production. In fact, no serious economic activity, other than slave raiding, can flourish in a state of war such as Borno found herself in as from 1893.

One consequence of the destruction of Kukawa and the death, enslavement or dispersal of its 120,000 inhabitants, and the continuous ravages and plundering of Rabih troops, was the depopulation of northern and central Borno as people fled before the invading army in large numbers. This was because not only their property but they themselves were legitimate target of the invaders as large numbers of peoples were enslaved.³⁹⁷ Those that remained

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ Interview, Alhaji Grema Bukar, May 25, 1993.

³⁹⁷ NAK, Maiprof.4, D.16: Report of Nganzai District; Palmer,

behind were continuously ravaged and plundered.

The Koyam and the inhabitants of Bayamari in the Geidam area emigrated out of the reach of the invaders; the former to Muniyo and the latter to Katagum.³⁹⁸ Most settlements along the Yobe valley stretching from Damagaram in the west to Yau in the east were in ruins when Foureau passed through the area in 1899.³⁹⁹ Maine Soroa, Bagara, Malumri, Kaleri, and Kandirwa, had been completely razed to the ground and were littered with human skeletons, broken pots and calabashes.⁴⁰⁰ Even near Lake Chad and along its shoreline, Yau was in ruins and the fertile farmlands of Kauwa and Beri had been abandoned, the population having taken refuge on the islands of the Lake.⁴⁰¹ Similarly, even settlements on the north bank of the Yobe were not spared as Bula-Gana was sacked, causing the people of N'guigmi to flee in anticipation of attack by Rabih.⁴⁰²

The pastoralists were not an exception either as their livestock were confiscated. The Koyam of Nganzaï and the Badawi of Gubio were the hardest hit. The Koyam had practically the whole of their cattle seized for their rôle in, and support for, *Mallam Abu Gantur's* resistance and the killing of Sugur; and the Badawi, the largest owners and rearers of camels in metropolitan Borno, on the other hand became the victims of Rabih's voracious appetite and highly developed culinary preference for camel meat and milk.⁴⁰³

Due largely to lack of a clear idea of how to manage an agriculture based economy such as Borno's and lack of empathy for the Borno people, the invading army adopted a scorched-earth-policy by destroying standing crops and razing settlements to the ground after sacking and looting

1929: 28 Hallam, 1977: 161-3.

³⁹⁸ Urvoy, 1949: 127; Hallam, 1977: 167.

³⁹⁹ Foureau, 1902: 589 ff.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; Hallam, 1977: 161.

⁴⁰¹ Hallam, 1977: 161.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

⁴⁰³ NAK, Maiprof.4, D.16: Report of Nganzei District.

them. Such tactics was not new to Rabih - he had used it in all his previous wars and in all places he camped at on his way to Borno - but Borno should have been a different case as he intended to settle down, but this dawned on him only after the agricultural base had been irreplaceably destroyed. For in Dar Kuti, Rabih is remembered for having "eaten the land [...] where he passed, he took all".⁴⁰⁴ He left Baghirmi completely denuded of food, followed by a prolonged famine.⁴⁰⁵

After 1895, the troops learnt not to destroy standing crops, since this had the effect of luring back inhabitants who were in hiding to come out of their cover and resettle, harvest the crops, and even plant new ones. This new tactics was adopted not to boost food production but to allow resettlement with a view to raiding them the next season.⁴⁰⁶ Agriculture was completely neglected in Rabih's Borno. In fact, Rabih had no agricultural policy. The consumption of grain increased because of the high demand for corn-based alcoholic beverages by his troops while production declined considerably.⁴⁰⁷ The food situation was so acute that a contemporary account reported that Rabih might be forced to "quit Bornu soon in search of food".⁴⁰⁸ That one of the items in great demand by Rabih's caravans at the market of Gamawa was grain underscores the seriousness of the food situation.⁴⁰⁹ The acute food crisis was such that Goldie reported "extreme drought in the province of Dikoa [Dikwa]"⁴¹⁰ by 1898. There was no natural drought in Dikwa at this time but a man-made one as the farming population had fled, been enslaved, or pressed into the army. Reference has been made to the fact

⁴⁰⁴ M. Abbo to Chevalier in 1910, cited by Cordell, 1985:180.

⁴⁰⁵ Everett, 1898.

⁴⁰⁶ Hallam, 1977: 161-3.

⁴⁰⁷ PRO, FO 403/233: Statement of Hadj Arfan Turki, Inclosure no.95, Tripoli, April 10, 1896,

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Hallam, 1977: 168.

⁴¹⁰ PRO, CO 446/5, Goldie to FO, March 21, 1899.

that the abundance of food and closeness to the grain fields of Balge were some of the major reasons for Rabih's choice of Dikwa as capital in 1894.⁴¹¹ In any case, no one would want to farm for the fruit of his labour to be confiscated by Rabih's troops. Due to the complete ravage and lack of food in the Dikwa area, Rabih had started storing grains in the Gujba region.⁴¹² This was the only area that survived the ravages and depredations of Rabih. In fact, this area did not witness the movements of Rabih or his troops until the movement of Fadl-Allah into the area after the defeat and destruction of Rabih by the French in April 1900. This area survived the activities and despoliation of Rabih for a number of reasons. First, it was far removed from Dikwa and the theatre of Rabih's wars in northern and central Borno, the areas to which Rabih's troops directed most of their plundering and looting campaigns. Second, Gujba was a frontier garrison bordering the non-Muslim and unsubjugated Marghi, Bura and Kibaku, therefore, a strong loyal and friendly Gujba was necessary for security of the border in the south-west. Third, the early submission of *Kachella Abdullahi Ali Marghi* shielded the area from the wars of pacification, which might otherwise have been necessary to bring the area under control. Gujba was, therefore, one of the very few areas in metropolitan Borno where some semblance of normalcy existed and this accounted for the availability of food in the area. In addition to storing food at Gujba, Rabih had also moved to the Karagawaru district in search of food.⁴¹³ The food situation continued to deteriorate such that even Fadl Allah was forced to quit his camp at Burguma for Fika in May 1901 "owing to want of food".⁴¹⁴

Rabih Fadl Allah so thoroughly conquered Borno that in the process he destroyed the state's productive

⁴¹¹ See p. 59 above.

⁴¹² PRO, CO 445/5, D.M.I. January 6, 1899.

⁴¹³ PRO, CO 446/5, Goldie to FO, March 21, 1899.

⁴¹⁴ PRO, CO 446/19, *Morning Post*, December 12, 1901.

agricultural base and was not able to revive it. The food situation so worsened that it threatened his position and continued existence in Borno. As is characteristic of his previous wars and settlements, it was time to move but there was no safe retreat, surrounded as he was by hostile neighbours who had refused even to trade with him.

Internal Trade

Trade was second only to agriculture in the economy of nineteenth century Borno prior to the advent of Rabih Fadl Allah. Under Rabih it superseded agriculture in importance though it also suffered a tremendous decline. The local trade was highly integrated into the economy of the agricultural sector and was basically financed from the surplus appropriated from agriculture. Most traded products were local and predominantly agricultural produce and food items, such as grains, livestock, dairy products, fish, meat, and building materials.

Unlike the highly specialised external trade network, with a distinct class of traders and a limited number of consumers for their luxury imported items, such as mirrors, silk, needles, sword blades, beads, carpet, woollen caps, writing materials, sandalwood, scent etc.; this trade was more widespread and involved more producers, traders, and consumers. This trade was very efficient, well organised, and succeeded in bringing together the rural and urban dwellers to the weekly markets for commercial intercourse. The Monday market of Kukawa was very successful and boomed.

For trade and commercial intercourse - both internal and external - like agriculture, the invasion had disastrous consequences. This is because trade and related activities cannot flourish in a state of war and siege, such as Borno was undergoing between 1893 and 1902. The state of insecurity and uncertainty was inimical to any serious trading activity.

Due largely to the close integration between internal

trade and trade of the sub-region, particularly with Hausaland to the west and Fombina and the Benue to the south, the economic blockade placed on Borno by the neighbouring states brought local trade to a standstill. This is in addition to the near state of anarchy prevailing within Borno itself. Before this time Gumei market served as the entrepot for Borno natron into Hausaland and beyond to the markets of Kano for further re-distribution by Hausa merchants. Barth, in 1851, saw at Gumei a lot of Kano bound natron "amounting to at least one thousand loads".⁴¹⁵ The closure of this route following the trade embargo affected the local market tremendously. The plunder and sacking of Kukawa and the massive demographic movements it caused, Rabih's monopoly and tight grip over trade as all items of importance, such as ivory, ostrich feathers, and gold dust had to pass through him for sale on behalf of the owners, who were repaid after the *Amir* had taken a handsome commission⁴¹⁶, coupled with the trade sanction imposed on Borno by the neighbouring states, effectively undermined the local trade. No serious attempt was made to revive this trade as Rabih focussed his attention towards re-establishing trade with the outside world, which alone could guarantee his hold on and domination of Borno by providing his much needed arms and gunpowder and buy his abundant slaves. The destruction of the local trade was more serious and had a direct impact on the people of Borno, as it was the trade known to them while for Rabih, the external one was more important.

⁴¹⁵ Barth, I, 1965: 320.

⁴¹⁶ Sudan Archives, School of Oriental Studies, University of Durham, item no. 263: Account of Hadj Khalifa El Ginnad in Weld-Blundell to F.R. Wingate, December 12, 1896. Henceon El-Ginnad, 1896.

External Trade

The conquest of Borno, and the attendant destruction it wrought on Kukawa and its large community of North African traders seriously disrupted Borno's foreign trade and brought the Borno-North Africa trade to a halt. The North African trading community lost heavily both in life and property. About fifty of them lost their lives in the wars with Rabih or at his hands or owing to illness following the conquest of Borno.⁴¹⁷ Amongst them were some of the wealthiest, including Sharif Shashimi the wealthiest of them all and leader of the North Africa community in Borno, and Ahmad Fokshi.⁴¹⁸ On the eve of the invasion these traders took some precautionary measures to safeguard their property. First, when some of them decided to flee Borno, the merchants agreed that their wares and wealth be pooled and divided into two, with the understanding that whichever side won would share its holding with the side that lost.⁴¹⁹ Second, when it dawned on them that they, with their repeating rifles, were going to be pressed into the Borno army, they formed themselves into gangs of five and from each gang one person was left behind at Kukawa to look after their property.⁴²⁰ Even with this ingenious plan, their losses were enormous as Rabih not only confiscated the goods of those that stayed behind in Borno but also despatched troops to bring back those that fled with their merchandise. From the thirty⁴²¹ North African traders that

⁴¹⁷ PRO, FO 403/233: Statement of Hadj Arfan Turki. Arfan gives the number of those who lost their lives either in the war or war-related causes as 52; FO 101/84, Africa no.3, Alfred Dickson to FO, April 13, 1894.

⁴¹⁸ Mukhtar, 1992: 49.

⁴¹⁹ Lavers, 1977: 22-3.

⁴²⁰ El-Ginnad, 1896.

⁴²¹ Account of North African Traders in *Egyptian Intelligence Report*, no.38, May 1895; Palmer, 1929: 108 gives their number as 21. We prefer the former account given as it were by participants.

stayed behind, Rabih seized 4,000 items of clothing, 500 *alkyabbas*, 100 blunderbusses, 160 rifles without cartridges and 3,800 lbs. of gunpowder.⁴²² From the run-away traders were seized 100 large ivory tusks, 70,000 Maria Theresa dollars, 250 bales of ostrich feathers, 30,000 sheep and goats, and 100 head each of camel and cattle.⁴²³ The total loss of the North African traders was put at £ 40,000 - £ 60,000.⁴²⁴

These traders were completely wiped out as an economic power as they were impoverished. They were granted pardon only after they had been completely stripped of their wealth and source of power.⁴²⁵ Hadj Arfan Turki, who concealed some of his wealth from Rabih, was put in chains and flogged daily for a month and was in mortal danger of his life but for the intercession of some of his colleagues. He lost 200 naticals of gold dust and 30 bales of ostrich feathers to Rabih.⁴²⁶

The immediate effect of the travails of the North African traders was the complete obliteration of the merchant class and their capital. They were so impoverished that the Amir had to provide them with transport animals any time they wanted to leave Borno. This way Rabih succeeded in making them dependent on him. In the long run, it made the re-opening of the Borno-North Africa trade route impossible as the seizures at Kukawa affected not only those traders resident in Borno but most especially their financiers in Tripoli.⁴²⁷

In 1895, Rabih attempted to break his commercial isolation and open up trading links in all directions, but his efforts did not yield much because this was the same year

⁴²² Palmer, 1929: 108.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁴ PRO, FO 101/84 Africa no.3 Dickson to FO, Tripoli, April 13, 1894; FO 403/233: Statement of Hadj Arfan Turki.

⁴²⁵ SASOS.

⁴²⁶ FO 403/233: Statement of Hadj Arfan Turki.

⁴²⁷ PRO, FO 101/84 Africa no.3 Dickson to FO, Tripoli, April 13, 1894.

that the Jews, the main financiers of the Borno-Tripoli trade, decided to withdraw from financing trade along that route due to their previous losses and the enormous risks it now involved.⁴²⁸ Second, the few North African traders left in Borno also decided to leave, any that remained were either clients of Rabih or his hostages.⁴²⁹ Third, by 1895, Rabih had realized the indispensability of this group of traders and started making attempts to appease it by making generous concessions such as the supply of 400 camels for them to go and collect their debt at Zaila (Fezzan).⁴³⁰ We are not certain as to what happened to these traders but it is very unlikely that they returned to Borno.

All attempts by Rabih to re-open the Borno-Tripoli route using various conciliatory methods, such as appeasing the traders, and sending a large gift of 700 slaves and 20 bales of ostrich feathers to his inveterate enemy, *Kolak Yusuf* of Wadai, failed to open the route.⁴³¹ His attempts to re-open the route via Kufra and Jalo to Benghazi and thence Tripoli was also blocked by the hostility of the Awlad Sulayman Arabs and the refusal of the Tuareg, the major transporters, to hire out their camels on this particular route.⁴³²

As a second best alternative to the firm closure of the Borno-Tripoli route Rabih directed his attention to the rich markets of Kano in the west, with a view to obtaining his North Africa supplies through Kano. Even though the Sokoto Caliph, Abdurahman, was said to have told William Wallace of the Royal Niger Company, in 1894, that his relations with Rabih were cordial,⁴³³ the Borno-Kano route

⁴²⁸ Gentil, 1973: 26.

⁴²⁹ PRO, FO 403/233: Statement of Hadj Arfan Turki.

⁴³⁰ Palmer, 1929: 108.

⁴³¹ PRO, FO 101/84, Africa no.11, Alvarez to FO, Benghazi, December 30, 1894.

⁴³² PRO, FO 101/86 Incl. no.4, Jago to FO, Tripoli, August 19, 1896; FO 101/86, Africa no.10, Jago to FO, Tripoli, September 5, 1896.

⁴³³ Everett, 1898.

was firmly shut on Rabih from 1893 to 1897.⁴³⁴ To ameliorate this situation, Rabih, late in 1895, sent messages to *Sarkin Kano*, Aliyu Baba, promising immunity and protection to all traders wishing to come to Borno. Shortly after, three Tripoli caravans with Manchester goods left Kano for Dikwa.⁴³⁵ Towards the end of 1896, the *Caliph* decreed and directed the *Sarkin Kano* not to allow any commercial transactions between Kano and Dikwa. The *Caliph*, who was apparently aware of the three Tripoli caravans that had left Kano for Borno, also legalised the plunder of any caravans flouting the order and the killing of its members.⁴³⁶ In conformity with this order, a large Rabih caravan travelling from Dikwa, with Kano as its destination loaded with ostrich feathers, ivory and other goods was intercepted and looted by the people of Kano. The members of the caravan were also killed.⁴³⁷ The closure of the Borno-Kano route scuttled Rabih's desire to use the Kano market as transit for his trade with North Africa.

The only Tripoli caravan to have successfully reached Dikwa arrived in June 1896. The caravan, valued at £ 400, raised hopes in North Africa that the trade route may be revived as it reported favourable treatment by Rabih, good terms of trade, safe and open roads, and recommended the despatch of more and bigger caravans.⁴³⁸ This did not lead to any improved trading links or the arrival of more caravans because of the general distrust of Rabih by the North African traders and the perception that Rabih may be luring the big caravans in order to seize them.

By 1898, it was reported that the Borno-North Africa

⁴³⁴ Adeleye, 1970a: 240.

⁴³⁵ PRO, FO 101/86 Africa no.10, Jago to FO, Tripoli, September 5, 1896.

⁴³⁶ PRO, FO 101/86 Africa no.10, Jago to FO, Tripoli, September 17, 1896.

⁴³⁷ PRO, FO 101/86 Africa no.12, Jago to FO, Tripoli, December 29, 1896.

⁴³⁸ PRO, FO 101/86 Africa no.12, Jago to FO, Tripoli, December 3, 1897.

trade had not picked up. In fact, it was to remain closed till the demise of Rabih. The trade along this route continued to decline and North African traders were not even hopeful that it would pick up again.⁴³⁹ The value of ivory exports to North Africa from Borno which stood at an annual average of 18,630L for the years 1887-1896 plummeted to only 9,200L in 1897.⁴⁴⁰

Table Four: Prices Current at Dikwa, July 1895

Item		Price
Blue clothe	24 yards	6 Maria Theresa dollar ¹
Long clothe	26-30 "	6 " " "
Ordinary red clothe		3 " " "
Ordinary black clothe		2 " " "
English military cloaks (worn)		8 " " "
Coloured cotton barracans		5 " " "
Prints	12 yards	4 " " "
Shirting	40 yards	12 " " "
Martini Henry Rifle		100 " " (each)
" " cartridges		½ " " (each)
Double barelled fowling pieces		50 " " (each)
Gunpowder (flask)		15 " " "
Percussion caps (per 1000)		10 " " "
Ivory (for 40 okes) ²		30 " " "
White & black ostrich feathers (per oke)		2½ " " "
Small ash-coloured ostrich feathers (per oke)		1 " " "
Slaves (per head)		3-7 " " "

Source: PRO, FO 101/86, Alvarez to FO, Benghazi, September 19, 1896.

1. The Benghazi rate for the Maria Theresa dollar was a little over 2s. 1¼d.
2. The Tripoli oke was equal to 2.69 lbs. Grosidupois.

⁴³⁹ PRO, FO 101/88, Supplementary report for the year 1897 on the Vilayet of Tripoli by Consul-General Jago, 1898.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Rabih's main demands on this route just like any other route were arms and ammunition. The North African route was not of much help in ameliorating his arms problem as the export of arms into North Africa itself had been prohibited and the Mediterranean coast effectively policed.⁴⁴¹ Except for a few Greek smugglers, the import of guns and gunpowder to Tripoli was firmly checked. The smuggled ones were proportionately more expensive and the quantity very negligible such as to reach Borno, or to make any impact, even if it did.⁴⁴² Whatever Rabih got was smuggled and most of it came from the Atlantic coast through the Royal Niger Company steamer at Ibi and their Hausa middlemen and not through the North African route.⁴⁴³

Military equipment was in high demand and in short supply as indicated by the prices current at Dikwa as shown in Table 4. The high cost of arms and gunpowder resulted from their importance to Rabih's continued survival and domination of Borno, the closure of foreign trade to Borno, and the fact that imported items are usually more expensive because of the additional costs and risks involved in the enterprise. Though Rabih supplemented his need for arms from his arsenal, he knew that this would not last long, and was therefore, largely dependent on the North African traders for the supply of sulphur used in the manufacture of gunpowder and capsules used in the firing of cap guns.

The commercial relations between Borno and the Sokoto Caliphate, but especially the eastern emirates, were inextricably interwoven with Rabih's political relations. Rabih's relation with the Sokoto Caliph, though reportedly cordial by 1894, did not lead to any meaningful commercial

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² PRO, CO 446/5, Niger Territories- Confidential no.1, Commander Roupell to Consul-General Sir R. Moor, December 12, 1898.

⁴⁴³ PRO, CO 446/5, Report on Rabeh Zubehr, D.M.I. Despatch, E.B. Macnaghton, May 12, 1899; FO 403/233: Statement of Hadj Arfan Turki.

intercourse.⁴⁴⁴ This cordial relation was not to last long as the *Caliph*, alarmed by Rabih's campaigns in Bade and along his eastern borders, ordered firm closure of the Caliphate's trade with Borno in 1896.⁴⁴⁵

Katagum, having benefited tremendously from the trade with Rabih, was reluctant to enforce the *Caliph*'s ban and cut off relations with Borno. However, the direct threat posed to Katagum and the widespread rumour that Rabih would attack Kano probably through Katagum,⁴⁴⁶ a rumour reinforced by his praise-singers' boast, alarmed Katagum. Katagum decided it to enforce the *Caliph*'s ban on trade.⁴⁴⁷ The closure of the Katagum market led to the emergence of Gamawa as the entrepot for Hausa traders willing to trade with Borno in spite of an official ban. Gamawa became a thriving commercial centre. The *Sarkin Gamawa*, Magaji dan Alkali Adamu, continued to trade with Borno even when Rabih was openly hostile to Katagum.⁴⁴⁸ By 1897, Gamawa had increased in size and commercial prosperity and the *Sarkin Gamawa* became rich on account of this trade and revenues derived from it. This trade continued to the end of Rabih's regime in spite of protestations of Katagum and Kano.⁴⁴⁹

Even when there was a lull in Gamawa's trade because of combined Katagum and Kano pressure, the market was shifted further east to Misau as an alternative trading post for the Rabih-Hausaland trade.⁴⁵⁰ This informal trade, though important to Rabih, was not sufficient enough to change his economic fortunes rather it enriched the Hausa middlemen.

The economies of both the eastern emirates of the

⁴⁴⁴ Hallam, 1977: 169 believes the smuggling between Katagum and Borno to have official sanction on both sides.

⁴⁴⁵ Adeleye, 1970a: 240.

⁴⁴⁶ Letter no.97 in Backwell, 1927: 61.

⁴⁴⁷ Hogben and Kirk-Greene, 1966: 61.

⁴⁴⁸ Low, 1972: 196.

⁴⁴⁹ Hallam, 1977: 171.

⁴⁵⁰ Letters 98 and 99, Backwell, 1927: 61-2.

Sokoto Caliphate and Bornu were interdependent and tied to the east-west regional trade route. The cessation of trade was injurious to the commercial prosperity of both states. This in part accounts for the informal trade carried on in spite of the *Caliph's* ban. Kano merchants were adversely affected by the ban as they intended to take advantage of the good terms of trade and the high prices prevalent at Dikwa.

The collapse of the Rabih-Hayatu alliance and the death of the latter, in 1897, Rabih's withdrawal from western Bornu, and the realisation that the Royal Niger Company rather than Rabih was the real immediate danger following the company's attack on Bida and Ilorin, in 1897, softened the *Caliph's* hard stance towards Rabih. By 1898, some Rabih messengers were received at Sokoto through Katagum and Zaria.⁴⁵¹ These, though significant enough diplomatically, did not lead to increased trade as the ban remained in force up to 1901.

Rabih's attempt to trade with the Royal Niger Company on the Benue was not successful either. This was because of the hostility of Mandara and Fombina through whose territory the shortest route to the Benue passed. Rabih's caravans, therefore, had to take the longer route via Gombe and Bauchi to Lau and Ibi on the Benue due to the closure of the Mandara-Fombina route.⁴⁵² Rabih's envoys reached Lau and contacted the company as early as 1895 to negotiate the purchase of gunpowder but not much came out of that as the company was said to have stopped the importation of arms and arms related products to the Benue. In spite of this, some gunpowder did reach Rabih from the company through the agency of Hausa traders. The attempt to open up the Benue trade was not successful because of the British company's distrust for Rabih and the fear of arming an already strong and highly belligerent local

⁴⁵¹ Hallam, 1977: 171.

⁴⁵² Adeleye, 1970a: 240.

potentate, and the hostility of Borno's neighbours to the south.

To the north, Wadai cut off all communications with Borno even for pilgrims.⁴⁵³ Rabih's large gifts to *Kolak Yusuf* of Wadai, in 1894, did not lead to any trade relations. The hostility of the Awlad Sulayman Arabs and the unwillingness of the Tuareg to hire out their transport animals closed the north-east route completely. Rabih's messengers to Damagaram, in c. 1895, were received and sent back with large gifts for Rabih but without any promise of trade. Zinder's attitude was actually hostile and calculated to buy time.⁴⁵⁴ For Rabih, as Adeleye aptly put it:⁴⁵⁵

[H]ad conquered Bornu so thoroughly that he had ruined all that he should have inherited if he was to succeed at last in guaranteeing survival and the establishment of a permanent and stable regime such as would bring his wanderings to a halt.

Rabih's inability to open up trade relations with his neighbours and across the Sahara made his position in Borno untenable as all his supply lines were cut. As an experienced soldier, he knew the inherent dangers of an army surrounded by hostile powers and without a stable and safe supply line.

In the Rabih state, governmental machinery and the economy were all geared towards maximally exploiting the resources of the state for the interest of the *Amir* and his army. Rabih's antecedent political relations in the area, the manner of his conquest, and the fear it induced all added to his isolation. The massive exploitation of human and material resources, coupled with the lack of any attempt to

⁴⁵³ PRO, FO 101/84, Africa no.10, Alvarez to FO, Benghazi, October 6, 1894.

⁴⁵⁴ PRO, FO 60/497, Diary of Sheriff Hassan, April 11, 1896; Adeleye, 1970a:240.

⁴⁵⁵ Adeleye, 1970a: 240.

replenish these resources soon threatened Rabih's position in Borno. The destruction of Kukawa and the loss it caused the North African trading community in Borno and their financiers in Tripoli and the economic isolation placed on Borno by his northern neighbours brought the century's old Borno-North Africa trade to a halt.

Chapter Five

Foreign Relations

Rabih Fadl Allah's activities from the Sudan to Borno had earned him the hostility of various states and peoples. His occupation of Borno, the manner in which this was accomplished, coupled with his numerous military exploits and his neighbours' perception of him, completed his isolation in Borno. The social and economic dislocation and paralysis of Borno brought about by his conquest and the blockade placed on him by its neighbours could only be ameliorated by a revival of Borno's external links.

Rabih's relations with his neighbours were, to a large extent; determined by a desire to re-open Borno's trade links for the supply of the ever increasing military and other needs of his army, ensure the safety of his trade routes to promote trade and end his isolation, to guarantee the survival of the state and make his conquest of Borno worthwhile. His destruction of the North African traders in Kukawa, the seizure of their wares, and the insecurity of the northern route following the hostility of the Awlad Sulayman Arabs had firmly closed the northern route. This is in addition to the hostility of Muhammad al-Sanussi and *Kolak Yusuf* of Wadai to the northeast and the east. Rabih, therefore, turned to the Sokoto Caliphate and its constituent emirates in the west and the Royal Niger Company on the river Benue to the south for succour. He, however, did not abandon attempts to re-open relations with North Africa, Wadai, and the Sanussiya movement under Muhammad al-Sanussi to the east. A guarantee of protection and immunity to the North African trading communities⁴⁵⁶ and a general policy of appeasement towards Wadai⁴⁵⁷ and Damagaram proved futile. The North African route remained closed to him between 1893 and 1895 and never really picked up,

⁴⁵⁶ PRO, FO 101/84 Alvarez to FO, October 6, 1894.

⁴⁵⁷ Adeleye, 1970b: 402.

even after that period, while the Wadai route remained firmly closed to him till his death.

The major thrust of his policy towards Europeans was one of cautious detachment. Any relations with them was to be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Rabih had indicated that only war existed between him and the Europeans.⁴⁵⁸ Yet, his complete isolation in Borno and the depletion of his military supplies forced him to seek to trade with the British. That he accepted to host the French explorer Fernand de Behagle at Dikwa, in 1899, underscores this.⁴⁵⁹ His general distrust and hostility to the Europeans is understandable. First, he was pushed out of Sudan by the Anglo-Egyptian government in 1879, after the detention of Zubair Pasha in Cairo and the killing of Sulayman Zubair and his followers in treacherous circumstances, both of whom he had served.⁴⁶⁰ He was himself hotly pursued until the outbreak of the Mahdist uprising in 1881, which also succeeded in erecting a buffer between them. Second, his association with Mahdism was bound to make him increasingly hostile to the Europeans; for the Mahdist revolt was not only religious but also political and anti-colonial. The Europeans on the other hand, sought to relate with Rabih because of their imperial rivalry. Each power sought to use him to claim effective occupation of the area he occupied. Ensconced in the Lake Chad basin, Rabih became very important to the European competition for the Chad basin. The European imperial powers, particularly Britain and France, believed that Borno was destined to fall to any power that could succeed in wresting a treaty from Rabih. Rabih had no intention of giving up his conquest but the important thing was that his policy was unknown. For, as Adeleye⁴⁶¹ plausibly argued, speculations about his

⁴⁵⁸ PRO, FO 2/118, RNC to FO, Incl. Diary of Sheriff Hassan (in Arabic) April 11, 1896; See also, FO 403/233, Diary of Shereef Asan; Al-Hajj and Lavers, 1973: 3-24.

⁴⁵⁹ Hallam, 1977: 231.

⁴⁶⁰ See p. 30ff.

⁴⁶¹ Adeleye, 1970b: 402.

intentions gave rise to numerous rumours, often false, which actually gave rise to important political actions by both European powers and African governments.

Rabih's relations with the Mahdist movement and his alliance with its supporters in the Lake Chad basin under the leadership of Hayatu b. Sa'id seriously affected his relations with the Sokoto Caliphate and shaped the attitude of the caliphate and those of its eastern emirates towards him. Even before Rabih's invasion of Borno, Mahdism had become a threat to the caliphate and had seriously undermined the authority of the *Caliph*.⁴⁶² Therefore, an alliance between Rabih and local Mahdists was bound to send fear and apprehension to the Caliphate and its constituent emirates and compromise Rabih's diplomatic position in Borno. It is in the context of Rabih's relations with the Mahdists and his belligerent posture that Sokoto's reactions to Rabih's offer of friendship should be viewed.

Rabih and Mahdism

The establishment of a Mahdist state in the eastern Sudan in 1881 and Rabih's involvement with that movement, real and imagined, and his alliance with its local representatives determined to a large extent the response of his neighbours. Rabih's exact relations with the Mahdist movement are blurred.⁴⁶³ Though he accepted the doctrine, wore the patched Mahdist cloth, fought under its flag, and practised its devotional rites as of 1888, most accounts maintain that he was not a genuine Mahdist.⁴⁶⁴

In 1883, two years after the establishment of the Mahdist state, the *Mahdi*, Muhammad Ahmad b. Abdallah, wrote urging Rabih to make the *hijra* and join the Mahdist

⁴⁶² Adeleye, 1971: 107.

⁴⁶³ Al-Hajj, 1973: 128.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

forces.⁴⁶⁵ Rabih, perhaps because the fate of the movement was still uncertain, conveniently ignored the call. Immediately after the death of the *Mahdi*, Khalifa Abdallah, the *Mahdi's* successor, made concerted efforts to recall Rabih back to the Sudan. In August 1886, Khalifa Abdallah wrote four letters to Rabih in one week.⁴⁶⁶ All the letters were written to emphasize to him the appreciable success made by the movement.

The period 1886-87 was one of unrest in the eastern Sudan, which threatened the survival of the Mahdist state.⁴⁶⁷ The *Khalifa* desperately needed Rabih to come and assist in putting down the rebellion.⁴⁶⁸ In one of the letters, the *Khalifa* implored Rabih to come with "your men, your military equipment and your provisions".⁴⁶⁹ Rabih, undoubtedly aware of developments in the eastern Sudan and the configuration of forces involved, was not eager to get entangled in a struggle whose outcome was far from clear. Besides, within the context of his diplomatic relations with other states it paid him to be seen as neutral, at least, for now.⁴⁷⁰ Rabih ignored the letter. Again in May 1887, *Khalifa* Abdallah wrote a letter and despatched five messengers to bring back a definite answer.⁴⁷¹ The *Khalifa* on this occasion sent a Mahdist flag, a patched cloth and a rifle, being symbols of a Mahdist *Amir*.⁴⁷² Rabih accepted the gifts and carried on his campaigns under the Mahdist flag thereafter but did not reply the letter until June 1888.

In his letter, Rabih conveyed his acceptance of the Mahdist doctrine and attributed his inability to perform the *hijra* ostensibly to numerous factors, amongst which are:

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*:129.

⁴⁶⁶ Al-Hajj, 1985: 133.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*:134.

⁴⁶⁸ Al-Hajj, 1985: 134; 44, 1973: 131.

⁴⁶⁹ SGAK, Daftar Sadir, no 10, item 125, Khalifa to Rabih Fadl Allah, 21 al-Qa'da 1303 A.H. \ August 22, 1888 A.D.

⁴⁷⁰ Adeleye, 1970a: 233.

⁴⁷¹ Al-Hajj, 1985: 133-4.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*:133.

Hayatu b. Sa'ids' declaration of intent to join Rabih in making the *hijra*, their inability to synchronize the movement; the decimation of Rabih's horses at Dar Mara, and the unwillingness of his troops to make a return trip, consequently causing low morale and even desertions.⁴⁷³ From the letter and subsequent events, it seems Rabih never seriously considered making the *hijra*.

It was at this time, c.1887, that Hayatu b. Sa'id initiated correspondence with Rabih.⁴⁷⁴ It is clear from Rabih's letter that Hayatu, isolated and harassed in Balda, wanted Rabih to come to his assistance.⁴⁷⁵ Hayatu saw in Rabih a potential ally in his struggle with the Sokoto Caliphate and its agents. Besides, the allies had a few things in common. They both claim to profess Mahdism, and believe in the efficacy of war even against Muslim states to achieve their aims.⁴⁷⁶

Hayatu b. Sa'id b. Muhammad Bello b. Usman Dan Fodio, a great grandson of *Shaykh* Usman Dan Fodio was born at Sokoto in c. 1840. He was brought up in the expectation of the *Mahdi*.⁴⁷⁷ Hayatu left Sokoto for the East after Mu'azu's appointment as *Caliph* in 1877, obviously dissatisfied with the succession in which his father, Sa'id b. Muhammad Bello, had lost out thereby making his own chances of succession very remote.⁴⁷⁸

Hayatu arrived Fombina with about thirty students and numerous followers in c. 1878.⁴⁷⁹ He was favourably received by *Lamido* Sanda, as much for his great learning and piety as for his ancestry, and lived for about four years in Yola. While in Yola, he was engaged in teaching, travelled extensively within the emirate and was said to have bought

⁴⁷³ SGAK, Nujumu Letterbook, item no 6, Rabih to Khalifa, 4th Shawal 1305 A.H./ June 14, 1888 A.D.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ Njeuma, 1978:199.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*:187; Adeleye, 1971: 104.

⁴⁷⁸ Adeleye, 1971: 104.

⁴⁷⁹ Abubakar, 1977: 131; Njeuma, 1978: 183.

and stored horses and bridles with the proceeds accruing to him from his scholarly activities.⁴⁸⁰ This seemed to have convinced his critics that Hayatu was in pursuit of empire and political power and not the enthronement of Mahdism.⁴⁸¹

From Yola, Hayatu moved northeast to settle at Balda in the sub-emirate of Bogo. At Balda, Hayatu gained a large following and exploited the political rivalries between the sub-emirates of Bogo, Marua, and Mindif, and between them and the Massa, Musgum, and Sumeya to become a major force.⁴⁸² In 1883, Hayatu declared his adherence to the *Mahdi*, Muhammad Ahmad b. Abdallah, and was in return appointed *Amir al-Gharb al-Mahdi* of the west and *Amir al-Muminin* of the Sokoto Caliphate.⁴⁸³ Hayatu cherished his new status and wrote to members of his family, the rulers of the Caliphate, its people and the emirates, imploring them to accept the *Mahdi* and perform the *hijra*, pointing out that those who refuse to do so were to be regarded as *Dajjal* (anti-Christ).⁴⁸⁴ This marked his final break with the established Caliphate.

Between 1883 and 1889 Hayatu subdued Bogo, attacked Mindif, and succeeded in subduing all the settlements between Marua and Balda.⁴⁸⁵ By 1890, Hayatu had dominated the area and Mahdism had become a potent threat to the authority of the *Lamido* of Fombina and the *Caliph* of Sokoto. In c. 1887, between this period of sway and the battle with *Lamido* Zubairu, Hayatu initiated correspondence with Rabih.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁰ Njeuma, 1978: 185; East, 1935: 111-3; Kirk-Greene, 1958: 142.

⁴⁸¹ I am grateful to late Professor Eldridge Mohammadou for this information.

⁴⁸² Interview, Alhaji Abubakar Garba Sai'd, February 14, 1994; Abubakar, 1977: 132; Adeleye, 1971: 104.

⁴⁸³ Njeuma, 1978: 186-7; Abubakar, 1977: 132.

⁴⁸⁴ Adeleye, 1977: 105 & fn 107.

⁴⁸⁵ Abubakar, 1977: 133.

⁴⁸⁶ Njeuma, 1978: 199 & fn 2.

In 1892, fresh from his defeat of *Lamido Zubairu*, Hayatu along with his lieutenants Yusuf Babikir al-Mandarati and al-Hajj Muhammad al-Amin al-Mallawi visited Rabih at Manjaffa. The initiative to enter an alliance was said to have come from Rabih and that Hayatu was actually invited to Manjaffa by the former.⁴⁸⁷ Rabih was at this time contemplating a push northwards through Wadai into Borno. Hayatu on the other hand, though, had defeated Zubairu but had lost heavily as his base Balda was sacked in the process. He now sought Rabih's assistance to invade Mandara as a prelude to his enthronement in the Sokoto Caliphate. Rabih sent him off with a promise of future assistance and the alliance was sealed with the marriage of Rabih's daughter, Hauwa, to Hayatu. The couple was escorted to Balda by an armed detachment under Fadl Allah.

Early in 1893, while Rabih was at Logone, Hayatu came to remind him of his promise of assistance against Mandara. At this time, Rabih was planning an invasion of Borno. Though against an invasion of Borno, a state he regarded as Islamic, and needed its alliance, or, at worst neutrality, in the Rabih–Hayatu projected invasion of the Sokoto Caliphate, Hayatu was unable to dissuade Rabih.

Between 1894 and 1897, Hayatu lived in Dikwa. He came to realize, when it was too late, that Rabih's association with Mahdism was dubious. Rabih had no intention of enthroning Mahdism in the Sokoto Caliphate. Besides, apart from politically motivated symbolic commitment to Mahdism, Rabih had not made any attempt to entrench Mahdism even in Borno. Hayatu became very restive and lived under some sort of captivity in Dikwa. Late in 1897, when Rabih left Dikwa to watch the movement of the French along river Shari, Hayatu with the assistance of forces sent in by Jibril Gaini under his son, Hassan, attempted to escape but was pursued, caught up with and

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

killed by Fadi Allah. Rabih's compact with Hayatu, in 1892, and the breakdown of this alliance, in 1897, considerably affected the attitude of the Sokoto Caliphate towards Rabih.

Relations with Neighbouring States

Rabih Fadl Allah's relations with Borno's former tributary states differed from those with foreign states. It was intermediate in nature between those he pursued towards occupied lands and foreign states. These tributary states were all on Borno's borders. They included the Kotoko principalities to the east, the Marghi-Kibaku chiefdoms and Mandara to the south, and the chiefdoms of Fika, Bade, and Potiskum in the west. In the north were Machena, Muniyo, Damagaram, Gumel, and the *Galadima*'s province of Nguru. Most of these areas had, by 1893, been subject to Borno only in name. Those areas that were not menacing did not receive Rabih's immediate attention. His attention focused on those states that not only refused to submit but were also in a position to affect the safety of his trade routes. The Marghi and Kibaku areas were occasionally raided to ensure access to the Benue and to Fombina.⁴⁸⁸ Potiskum submitted early, and even though settlements close to it were raided, it was left alone.⁴⁸⁹

There seems to have been some similarity in policy towards the other states. All of them were called upon to submit immediately after the fall of Kukawa. Dambam and Nguru made early submissions but these were soon overtaken by events. Dambam, persistently harassed by Misau and unable to secure aid with which to counter it, soon placed itself under Kano's protection.⁴⁹⁰ That this failed to provoke a response from Rabih is amazing. This is probably because he was more interested in the security of

⁴⁸⁸ Hallam, 1977: 152-3.

⁴⁸⁹ Lavers, 1972: 5.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*:7.

trade routes, which passed through it than the occupation of a tiny emirate.⁴⁹¹ The *Galadima* of Nguru, Muhammad Kolomi, also submitted early in 1894.⁴⁹² Emboldened by his new found ally, *Galadima* Kolomi attacked southern Damagaram in 1895. The attack boomeranged and the *Galadima* was chased out of Nguru,⁴⁹³ and Damagaram replaced him with *Galadima* Kyari b. Umar.⁴⁹⁴ *Galadima* Kolomi took refuge with Rabih, who stationed him at Borsari. It seems this military presence was responsible for most of the sorties attributed to Rabih in western Borno.

The Kotoko principalities were pacified as a prelude to Rabih's invasion of Borno. Karnak Logone was garrisoned under Uthman Wad Shakku basically to ensure the safety of the route to the east. Rabih initially confirmed all the chiefs of the various principalities that submitted to him and their stay in office was dependent on their continued loyalty to him.⁴⁹⁵ All the Kotoko principalities submitted except Shawe, whose inhabitants fled and took refuge on the islands and islets of Lake Chad.⁴⁹⁶

When summoned to submit, *Thikse* Bukar Anarbana of Mandara refused but sent the tribute of 10,000 Maria Theresa dollars and two hundred horses, which he usually paid to Borno.⁴⁹⁷ Rabih, who was unwilling to leave unsubdued such a strong enclave very close to his capital of Dikwa and commanding the strategic route to the Benue and Fombina, decided to invade Mandara in the dry season of 1893/4. Before this could be carried out, his attention was diverted by a more potent threat to his position in Borno, the resistance of *Mallam* Abu Gantur and that of *Shehu* Kyari.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*:4.

⁴⁹³ Dunbar, 1970: 75.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; Lavers, 1972: 4.

⁴⁹⁵ Lavers, 1972: 2.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; Hallam, 1977: 124.

⁴⁹⁷ Barkindo, 1989: 216; Hallam, 1977: 140.

⁴⁹⁸ Hallam, 1977: 140; Lavers, 1972: 2.

The invasion of Mandara eventually took place in 1896 to check the recalcitrance of its ruler and secure the route to the Benue. Even though Mandara was defeated, its ruler Bukar Anarbana taken prisoner and the capital of Dulo destroyed, the state remained unsubdued.⁴⁹⁹ Umar, Bukar Anarbana's son, who had survived the Dulo encounter, was appointed its new ruler and took refuge at the Mora range of mountains and continued to defy Rabih.⁵⁰⁰ Mandara was left alone not because of unwillingness on Rabih's part but because of his preoccupation with more important matters. It is not surprising, therefore, that on the arrival of the French on his eastern frontier; Rabih sought the friendship of Tlikse Umar b. Bukar, in 1897, to no avail.⁵⁰¹

By 1893, Damagaram was subject to Borno only in name. However, with the death of Sulayman, its new ruler, Ahmadu, sent envoys to Borno for formal confirmation of his ascension to the throne as had been the usual practice. His envoys met the newly proclaimed Shehu Kyari at Geidam who confirmed the ascension shortly before he set out to take the field against Rabih at Gashegar.⁵⁰²

After his occupation of Borno, Rabih sent out messengers to Damagaram, late in 1894 or early 1895, asking her to submit.⁵⁰³ Sarki Ahmadu prevaricated but sent back the envoys with a large gift including 2,000 Maria Theresa dollars and 1,000 turkedi to Rabih, but without promise of trade or submission.⁵⁰⁴ Damagaram's attitude was and remained hostile. Ahmadu was, however, appeasing Rabih and buying time with a view to fighting back.

⁴⁹⁹ Barkindo, 1989: 217.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² Dunbar, 1970: 74.

⁵⁰³ Adeleye, 1970a: 240.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, PRO, FO 403/233, Diary of Shereef Asan.

Damagaram's policy was at this time shaped by its hostility to Borno and Kano.⁵⁰⁵ When Olive and Cajemajou arrived Zinder in May 1898, their mission was evaluated largely in terms of its relations with Rabih. In fact, they were killed on the suspicion that they intended to aid Rabih's invasion of Damagaram.⁵⁰⁶ Similarly one of the factors that fuelled Damagaram's crisis with Kano, culminating in the war of 1896-97, was the widespread rumour in Damagaram that Kano was planning an alliance with Rabih against it. This rumour also came to the notice of Cajemajou in 1898.⁵⁰⁷ Damagaram continued to serve as a centre of refuge and subversion. Many Kukawa notables, such as Umar Sanda, the eldest surviving son of *Shehu* Ibrahim, who had the largest following, lived at Zinder.⁵⁰⁸ Damagaram-Borno hostility persisted. *Sarki* Ahmadu attacked Borno's important outposts and sought to control trade routes which went to Borno. This accounts for the annexation of Machena, burning of Nguru, and the sacking of Gume. These campaigns against Borno dependencies which controlled its trade routes were undertaken to re-gain control of the routes and weaken Rabih's position. Despite these provocations, Rabih was deterred from responding by his military campaigns in western Borno and the threat of European attack from his eastern border, which made him withdraw from western Borno.

Bade also rejected Rabih's call to submit. However, frequent pillage of caravans passing through Bade to the important markets of Katagum and Gamawa compelled Rabih to send an expedition to Bade in 1896.⁵⁰⁹ The Bade army was routed. The *Mai Bade*, *Mai Duna*, fled taking

⁵⁰⁵ Dunbar, 1970: 72.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*:77.

⁵⁰⁸ Umar Sanda b. Ibrahim (Sanda Kura) was met at Bagara by the Foureau mission on its way from Zinder, and watched as he was appointed *Shehu* by a large jubilant Borno crowd in January 1900. Foureau, 1902: 589.

⁵⁰⁹ Hallam, 1977: 148; Lavers, 1972: 6.

refuge at Katagum. Fadi Allah burnt Gorgoram, the capital of Bade, and installed *Mai Salih* as the new ruler of Bade. *Mai Salih* continued to pay tribute to Dikwa.⁵¹⁰ The Bade expedition and the movement of Rabih's forces very close to the eastern emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate sent fear and panic throughout the Caliphate. Misau, not sure of where the invading army would take next, expelled all Rabih's people.⁵¹¹ Hadejia sent alarming messages to Kano that the invading army intended to march on Kano by way of Katagum, Hadejia or Damagaram.⁵¹² Gumel, independent since Rabih's invasion of Borno, turned to Sokoto for protection.⁵¹³

The Sokoto Caliphate

The Sokoto Caliphate, being the major power to the west of Borno and commanding the east-west trade route so vital to its economy was an obvious direction in Rabih's search to end his isolation.⁵¹⁴ Sokoto's policy towards Rabih was basically determined by its eastern emirates - contiguous with Borno rather than metropolitan Sokoto itself. This is consistent with Sokoto's characteristic defence policy of leaving direct responsibility for the defence of its frontiers to the emirates.⁵¹⁵ By 1894, Rabih's relations with the caliphate were reportedly cordial though this did not lead to any meaningful trade.⁵¹⁶ This cordial relation was not to last long as *Caliph Abdurahman*, alarmed by Rabih's campaigns in Bade and along his eastern borders, ordered

⁵¹⁰ Lavers, 1972: 6.

⁵¹¹ Letter no.96 in Backwell, 1927: 60-61.

⁵¹² Letters 94, 95, and 97 in Backwell, 1927; Adeleye, 1970b: 406; Fremantle, 1911-12: 64.

⁵¹³ Adeleye, 1970b: 406.

⁵¹⁴ Adeleye, 1971; Smaldone, 1977.

⁵¹⁵ Adeleye, 1971: 214.

⁵¹⁶ Hallam, 1977: 169.

the closure of the Caliphate's borders with Borno in 1896.⁵¹⁷ From this period up to about 1898, the Caliphate maintained a policy of prohibition of communication and trade with Borno, in order to deny Rabih access to gunpowder, which he desperately needed.⁵¹⁸

Borno-Sokoto relations were further complicated by the fact that Rabih was seen not only as an adherent of Mahdism, a movement which the Sokoto establishment had rejected long before Rabih's arrival in Borno, but also as an ally of Hayatu b. Sa'id, a scion of the Sokoto ruling house who had rebelled against his fatherland in the name of the *Mahdi* and caused extensive havoc in Fombina and called to question the authority of the *Caliph*.⁵¹⁹ Similarly, there was the widespread rumour that Rabih had designs on the caliphate, which was further strengthened by his trumpeters who popularised the tune "conquer Bornu and then comes Kano".⁵²⁰ This suspicion was reinforced by Rabih's desperate negotiations in all directions.⁵²¹ This hostility continued up to 1897, reaching its peak in the scare caused by Rabih's activities in the Bade country.⁵²²

Relations between the two states seem to have improved after 1897, following Rabih's withdrawal from western Borno without actually invading or in any way seriously violating the territory of the *Caliph*. In addition, the collapse of the Rabih-Hayatu compact and Hayatu's subsequent death in the hands of Rabih had reduced the potency of the threat of Mahdism. Similarly, the insidious activities of the Royal Niger Company in Bida and Ilorin, in 1897, convinced Sokoto that the real threat to the Caliphate lay in the European company not Rabih. It was during this period that some envoys were despatched to Sokoto passing through Katagum and Zaria. This led to some improvement

⁵¹⁷ Adeleye, 1970a: 240.

⁵¹⁸ Fremantle, 1911-1912: 63; Adeleye, 1970b: 403.

⁵¹⁹ Adeleye, 1970b: 402.

⁵²⁰ Fremantle, 1911-1912: 64.

⁵²¹ Adeleye, 1970b: 403.

⁵²² Lavers, 1972: 7.

in commerce between the two states though it was not sufficient to guarantee Rabih's position.⁵²³

The frontier emirates of the Caliphate had to adopt their own policies in relation to Rabih. This was because Sokoto did not take a definite position on Rabih before 1896, and even when the *Caliph* articulated a policy on the matter, these frontier emirates had to tread warily in order not to flout Sokoto's orders while at the same time being cautious not to provoke Rabih.

Kano

As at Rabih's invasion of Borno, Kano was just emerging from a devastating civil war. It, therefore, took Kano some while to react to developments in Borno. Kano sent envoys to greet the conqueror of Borno in 1895.⁵²⁴ As mentioned earlier, it was the complete isolation of Borno that turned his attention to the rich markets of Kano. This route was also closed to him due as much to internal problems in Kano and the insecurity of the roads than any concerted policy of isolating Rabih.

In order to induce Kano to open the route, Rabih sent messages to *Sarkin Kano*, Aliyu Baba, late in 1895, promising protection and immunity to all traders willing to trade in Borno.⁵²⁵ This led to the setting out of three Tripoli caravans carrying mainly European merchandise and textiles from Kano.⁵²⁶ However, there is no confirmation of their arrival.

As Aliyu Baba consolidated his position internally, he took stern measures. He ordered the implementation of the *Caliph's* order regarding the closure of borders and ban on

⁵²³ Letters no. 98 & 99, Backwell, 1927.

⁵²⁴ Palmer, 1929: 108.

⁵²⁵ PRO, FO 101/86, Jago to FO, Africa no 10, September 5, 1896.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

trade with Borno, in 1896. To this end he ordered the killing of any Kano traders flouting this order.⁵²⁷ This order closed the Kano markets to Rabih between 1896 and 1898. By 1898, relations between these states had picked up appreciably and Kano merchants were reported to be trading freely in Borno even though the *Caliph* had not formally revoked the ban on trade with Borno.⁵²⁸ In fact, the official policy remained unchanged even in Kano itself. As late as August 1898, the Royal Niger Company reported that not much information could be collected in Kano concerning Rabih as the authorities there would kill anyone who as much as mentioned his name.⁵²⁹

Katagum

Of all the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, Katagum was the most closely involved with Rabih. In 1895, Katagum market assumed an added importance following the closure of the Kano route.⁵³⁰ When Rabih sent messengers to demand his submission in 1895, *Sarkin Katagum*, Muhammad Alhaji, informed them that the decision to accept Rabih's overlordship was beyond him and that only the *Caliph* at Sokoto could take that decision.⁵³¹ When ordered to close the Katagum market by Aliyu Baba of Kano on account of the *Caliph's* decree in 1896, Muhammad Alhaji, not wishing to lose this prosperous trade with Rabih,

527 *Ibid.*

528 *Ibid.*

529 Lavers, 1972: 8.

530 C. H. Robinson was in Kano between December 1894 and March 1895. Though wishing to proceed to Lake Chad, he could not do so on account of his inability to get guides and carriers, because of the insecurity of the routes. Robinson, 1900: 120-21; Hallam, 1977: 146.

531 PRO, FO 403/233, Diary of Shereef Asan; Adeleye, 1970b: 403.

agreed but relocated the market to Gamawa.⁵³² When Aliyu Baba, in 1896, wrote, asking that Kano traders' transacting business in this market be pillaged and the bigger merchants be arrested and sent to him under escort, *Sarkin Katagum* Muhammad Alhaji ignored the call, arguing that he could not subject fellow Muslims to such an ordeal.⁵³³

Gamawa, the new Katagum market town, prospered. It doubled in size and a new town wall was erected to enclose it.⁵³⁴ *Sarkin Gamawa*, Magaji Sambo, a subordinate of *Sarkin Katagum*, sent rich presents and maintained good relations with Rabih.⁵³⁵ In fact, the desire of Muhammad Alhaji's successor, Sarki Abdu of Katagum to enforce Aliyu Baba's ban on Kano traders at the market was frustrated by *Sarkin Gamawa*.⁵³⁶

Fombina

Fombina's policy towards Rabih was one of caution, borne out of fear and distrust. Apart from the general fear and apprehension which Rabih's occupation of Borno caused within the Caliphate, *Lamido Zubairu* had an additional reason not to trust Rabih, following his alliance with his inveterate enemy Hayatu b. Sa'id. Rabih's envoys to Zubairu, in c. 1894, seeking to trade and open communications with the Benue were favourably received. And on its return, Zubairu was said to have sent gifts to Rabih.⁵³⁷ Even though *Lamido Zubairu* did not enter any formal agreement or an alliance with Rabih, he at least maintained an outward appearance of friendship with Borno.⁵³⁸

⁵³² Fremantle, 1911-12: 64; Hallam, 1977: 148.

⁵³³ Fremantle, 1911-12: 64.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁷ Njeuma, 1978: 202.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

Fombina's friendly disposition to Borno was to some extent dictated by its relations with the Europeans on the Benue. It was Zubairu's desire not to push Rabih into an alliance with the Europeans through open hostility. Second, Zubairu was satisfied with Rabih's recognition of his sovereignty, which only two years ago had been called in question by Hayatu b. Sa'id.⁵³⁹ Zubairu's initial hospitality and favourable reception at Yola of Egyptian envoys on a mission to Borno, in 1893, confirms his desire of friendly relations. However, on learning of the mission's British connections, he detained them for six months and expelled them from his territory, alerting all sub-emirates not to allow them pass through to Borno.⁵⁴⁰

Like other parts of the Caliphate, Fombina had its policy to Rabih affected by rumours. For instance, in 1897, *Lamido* Zubairu led an expedition to the north on the basis of a rumour that Rabih and Hayatu had moved south towards Marua. It turned out to be false alarm.⁵⁴¹ This fear of Rabih's invasion subsided with the death of Hayatu, in 1897, and relations between the two states improved. But then Zubairu's problems with the Royal Niger Company made Fombina unconducive to trade.⁵⁴²

The only incident concerning the movement of Rabih's forces into Fombina's territory occurred after the death of Rabih, in April 1900, when Fadl Allah, hotly pursued by the French, moved into Kilba country and Mubi in northern Fombina.⁵⁴³ This unexpected intrusion into his domains and his realisation that Fadl Allah was seeking access to the British with a view to getting their protection, provoked the hostility of Zubairu.⁵⁴⁴ Bent on forestalling

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁰ PRO, FO 60/497, RNC to FO, August 21, 1895; Njeuma, 1978: 203-4; Cf. Abubakar, 1977: 144 fn 80.

⁵⁴¹ Abubakar, 1977: 144.

⁵⁴² Lavers, 1972: 7.

⁵⁴³ NAK, Maiprof. 4, Gujba District Notebook; Gentil, 1902:231-2; Njeuma, 1978: 204.

⁵⁴⁴ Njeuma, 1978: 207.

that meeting between his two enemies, Zubairu effectively blocked the road to Fadl Allah, who noted him "as hostile".⁵⁴⁵ It was the desire to stop an alliance between Rabih and his European adversaries and the need to avoid an invasion from his northern flank that persuaded Zubairu to take a friendly disposition to Bornu. The intrusion into his territory and Fadl Allah's desperate search for British assistance had confirmed his fears and nullified the basis of his friendliness. Zubairu henceforth became hostile.

Rabih by his occupation of Bornu earned the hostility of all neighbouring states. Even when tension with some of them was relaxed, hostility gave way to distrust and caution. The travails of Sharif Hassan b. Husayn, an emissary of the Egyptian government to Rabih, are a good example. The information that he was going towards Rabih put him into serious trouble at Wadai, Kanem, Damagaram, and Kano, in which places he was harassed, detained, and in one instance ordered to be killed.⁵⁴⁶ On account of the widespread hostility to Rabih, Arabs generally were looked upon as Rabih's people with disdain.⁵⁴⁷ Rabih's isolation was complete. As an eye witness noticed in 1898, "Rabih is surrounded by antagonistic powers and hemmed in Bornu like a bird in a cage".⁵⁴⁸

Rabih's inability to break his isolation and re-open Borno's trade routes made his position very precarious indeed. As Adeleye aptly put it:⁵⁴⁹

Rabih found himself hoisted with his own petard;
he had conquered Bornu so thoroughly that he
had ruined all that he should have inherited if he

⁵⁴⁵ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to Chamberlain, April 12, 1901:
Incl. Fadl Allah to Hewby, January 31, 1901.

⁵⁴⁶ PRO, FO 403/233, Diary of Shereef Asan; Al-Hajj and Lavers, 1973.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ Adam Muhammad of Zinder as cited by Adeleye, 1970a:
240.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

was to succeed at last in guaranteeing survival and the establishment of a permanent and stable regime such as would bring his wanderings to a halt.

Relations with the Europeans

Rabih's occupation of Borno heightened intra-European rivalry and complicated matters for the European powers in their race for Lake Chad. Initially pushed out of the Sudan by the Anglo-Egyptian government, Rabih's continued westward movement was necessitated by economic and political conditions, which made his permanent establishment in any one place untenable. Though the establishment of the Mahdist state had created a barrier between him and the Europeans to the north, Rabih had wisely avoided pushing too far south to avoid a clash with Europeans established on the Congo. Rabih's area of operation, between the Bahr al-Ghazal and Lake Chad, was far in the interior and as yet out of menacing European presence or influence. The earliest contact with Europeans was on the arrival of the ill-fated Crampel mission to Dar Kuti in April 1891.

By the 1880s, European imperialism had taken keen interest in the area Rabih occupied. British companies operating on the Niger had under the influence of George Goldie amalgamated to form what became the Royal Niger Company to protect British imperial interest until the British government was ready to take-over in 1900.⁵⁵⁰ As early as 1883, the French had made establishment in the Chad basin an important objective of their imperial policy.⁵⁵¹ After the Berlin West Africa Conference, the Germans also began to manifest interest in the race for Lake Chad. After 1890, Borno, therefore, became the point of an anxious and often acrimonious rivalry between Britain, France, and

⁵⁵⁰ Adeleye, 1970b: 400.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Germany.⁵⁵²

Occupying an area of great interest and allotted by the three major imperial powers to themselves at Berlin, Baghirmi to the French, metropolitan Bornu to the British, and Rabih's capital, Dikwa and environs, to the Germans, it became clear to the European powers that unless a peaceful solution by way of an alliance with Rabih was found, at least, one of them would be forced to take the field against him.⁵⁵³

The rivalry between the European powers, especially that between Britain and France, the need to outwit the other by each power, and Rabih's vast military capacity made him a target in the race for the Lake Chad. Each power wanted to extract a treaty from him. Unknown to these powers Rabih was not only bent on preserving his independence but had come to realize that European powers do not keep promises with weak parties. His main policy towards them was one of caution borne out of fear and distrust. Yet, he was pragmatic enough to seek to trade with the British and to receive the French explorer Fernand de Behagle at Dikwa when the latter explained that his mission was purely commercial.

The French

The French made an early start for the penetration of their spheres of influence in the Central Sudan. From the 1880s, the basic objective of French imperial policy was the obsession to join their spheres in North Africa, West Africa, Equatorial Africa, Central Africa, and those possessions on the Niger-Benue water-ways and Lake Chad basin into one block of territory.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵⁵³ Al-Hajj and Lavers, 1973: 4.

⁵⁵⁴ Adeleye, 1970b: 400.

After the Say-Barrua Line Agreement of 5th August 1890 was signed, French policy was to determine which areas were independent of Sokoto and to establish their influence therein. This accounts for the various expeditions aimed at French expansion to Lake Chad. The Monteil Expedition of 1891-92 traversed the areas from Senegal to Borno, its destination, where it stayed for four months. The expeditions of Lt. de Vaisseau Mizon to the Benue in 1890-92 and 1892-93 were all part of the French race for Lake Chad; the Crampel, de Brazza, de Maistre and Ponel missions which set out from the Congo were to push up the Ubangi and Shari rivers to Lake Chad.⁵⁵⁵ The French race for Lake Chad was in part a response to the rapid growth of the Royal Niger Company on the Niger and Benue rivers and in part a desire to enter into some treaty with Rabih in Borno.⁵⁵⁶

Between 1894 and 1896, the French made attempts to use Zubair Pasha to gain access to Rabih. They, like the British, collected letters of introduction for Clozel in 1894 and for Gentil and Cajemajou in 1896.⁵⁵⁷ However, nothing came out of these attempts.

By September 1897, Gentil had arrived at Baghirmi and signed a treaty of protection with Gwaranga. It was here that Gentil learnt of Rabih's involvement in the murder of Crampel and the fact of his having received Crampel's weapons.⁵⁵⁸ The French had, at this time, abandoned any serious hope of an alliance with Rabih without, however, abandoning their claim to his territory.

Rabih was greatly disturbed by the appearance of the French on his eastern border. He therefore abandoned his campaigns in western Borno and suspended whatever intentions he had against the Sokoto Caliphate to

⁵⁵⁵ D'Arcy, 1904: 252.

⁵⁵⁶ Adeleye, 1971: 193.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*:192-3; Al-Hajj and Lavers, 1973: 6-7; Geidam, 1991: 29.

⁵⁵⁸ Gentil, 1902: 76.

concentrate on his eastern frontier. This menace was to continue till his death at the hands of the French on 22 April 1900. Rabih, no doubt aware of the dangers posed by the French to his position, tried to secure the friendship of *Tlikse Umar b. Bukar* of Mandara to no avail.⁵⁵⁹

By early 1898, Rabih, who had received full report of Gentil's movements in Baghirmi and along the Shari, went out on a punitive expedition and sacked Gulfei, Kusseri, and burnt Massenya for not opposing French encroachment into his territory.⁵⁶⁰ It was during this tensed atmosphere that Fernand de Behagle reached Dikwa in 1899. Fernand de Behagle was surprisingly initially well received by Rabih on learning that his mission was peaceful commerce.

By mid-1899, the French had put in place the second Gentil mission in the Lake Chad region. The object of this mission was to carefully occupy that portion of their territory already explored. This was to be effected by using the results of Gentil's first journey to the area, their treaty with Baghirmi and the establishment of a French Resident therein.⁵⁶¹ The mission was, however, advised not to provoke Rabih or engage him directly as he had become by right of conquest, master of that part of their territory. Gwaranga was, however, to be strengthened and supported by armed force should peaceful overtures fail.⁵⁶² By 17th July 1897, the French had had their first engagement with Rabih at the battle of Kuno with serious losses on both sides.⁵⁶³ With this battle, Rabih realized that French intentions had outstripped peaceful relations and therefore sent word for Fadl Allah to execute de Behagle, which was done on 15th October 1899 at Dikwa.

With the engagement of Kuno and the execution of de Behagle, whatever hopes the French had entertained of

⁵⁵⁹ Barkindo, 1989: 76.

⁵⁶⁰ Hallam, 1977: 227.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid*: 241.

⁵⁶² *Ibid*.

⁵⁶³ Hallam, 1977: 245; Gentil, 1902: 127-9.

peaceful relations with Rabih, were dashed. The French had to re-evaluate their position on the basis of the situation on the ground. With the losses at Kuno and Rabih taking the initiative, the French now became irrevocably committed to the use of force in their relations with Rabih.

The British

British interest in Borno antedated the conquest by Rabih. For as early as 1890, consequent on the signing of the Say-Barrua Treaty, the Royal Niger Company despatched a three hundred strong expedition, led by Charles MacIntosh, to Kukawa to secure a treaty with Shehu Hashimi of Borno. The mission was expelled without achieving any results.⁵⁶⁴ The failure of the Royal Niger Company in the race for Lake Chad was a setback for the British. They, however, did not give up. In the light of their rivalry with the French and French activities in the neighbourhood of Lake Chad, the British government, under persistent pressure from Sir George Goldie of the Royal Niger Company, entered into a treaty with Germany in 1893. The basic aim of this agreement was to check French expansion around Lake Chad and erect a buffer between French and British possessions in the area.⁵⁶⁵

The Mahdist uprising of 1881 had the effect of ending Anglo-Egyptian rule in the eastern Sudan and erecting a buffer between the British and Rabih. The British were, therefore, anxious to avoid an alliance between Rabih and the French, moving up from the Congo. British fear, though it proved unfounded, was that an alliance between Rabih and the French would allow the latter ample room to operate between Lake Chad and the Bahr al-Ghazal thereby

⁵⁶⁴ PRO, FO 84/2252, Goldie to FO, June 22, 1892; FO 84/2174, Extract from *The Times* of London, September 14, 1891; Flint, 1960: 171; Adeleye, 1970b: 401.

⁵⁶⁵ Adeleye, 1970b: 401.

compromising their imperial interest. Another reason for British fear was that Rabih might ally with the strongest power in the area, in this case the French, who would then lay claim to the area through suzerainty over him. For the general belief at this period by both the British and the French was that Rabih's state would pass into the hands of any power that succeeded in wresting a treaty from him.⁵⁶⁶ British fear was unfounded as Rabih was not only interested in preserving his independence but was averse to even contemplate an alliance with any European power. The important thing, however, was that Rabih's "policy was unknown and his movements unpredictable".⁵⁶⁷

The British had contemplated an alliance with Rabih as early as 1891 but had dropped the idea because of Rabih's remoteness from them and the lack of sufficient information on his activities.⁵⁶⁸ The idea was suspended and nothing was done until 1893. In 1893-94, the British in an attempt to enter friendly relations with Rabih had secured introductory letters from Zubair Pasha and sent envoys to him.⁵⁶⁹ One of the envoys, Abdullah al-Morghami delivered the letter to Rabih at Dikwa after a long delay, in 1894. The letter assured Rabih of the good intentions and friendliness of the British and the Germans and urged him to co-operate with them against the French.⁵⁷⁰ Rabih was, however, angered by Zubair Pasha's exhortations for him to co-operate with the Europeans and declared that only war existed between him and the Europeans.⁵⁷¹

The long delay in getting the messengers to Rabih caused Zubair Pasha to offer to communicate personally

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid:* 405.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid:* 402.

⁵⁶⁸ Adeleye, 1971: 192 fn

⁵⁶⁹ PRO, FO 2/118, Hardage to FO, November 24, 1893. Incl.

Zubair Pasha to Rabeah; Al-Hajj and Lavers, 1973: 5.

⁵⁷⁰ PRO, FO 2/118, Hardage to FO, November 24, 1893, Zubair Pasha to Rabeah.

⁵⁷¹ Adeleye, 1971: 193.

with Rabih. This was declined by the British.⁵⁷² Zubair Pasha did, however, send a letter to Rabih, in 1895, through his own network, explaining the European expansion and the need to co-operate with the British. It seems the person sent by Zubair Pasha was Sharif Hassan b. Husayn.⁵⁷³ In April 1896, two more letters were sent to Rabih through the desert route. One of the letters, apparently not very important, carried by al-Hajj Muhammad Yunus Bedes, fell into the hands of the Sanussiya brotherhood at Jaghbub and was forwarded to Istanbul.⁵⁷⁴ The fate of the second letter is unknown.⁵⁷⁵

With his establishment in Borno, Rabih attempted to trade with the Royal Niger Company steamer on the Benue. Though his relation with the company was cordial up to 1895, this did not last long as the company refused his repeated demands for gunpowder. The Royal Niger Company was cautious in its dealings with Rabih in order not to jeopardise relations with the Sokoto Caliphate and earn the hostility of its eastern emirates, especially Fombina.

British-Rabih relations did not develop to any appreciable level before his attention was diverted by the arrival of the French on his eastern border in 1897. The British would, however, come to play an important role in Borno after April 1900.

The Germans

In the 1880s, the Germans embarked on a vigorous programme of opening up the Benue waterways and their spheres of influence in that region to trade and subsequent occupation. The expeditions of Flegel (1879, 1882-3), Zintgraft (1888-9), Morgen (1890), von Stetten (1893), and

⁵⁷² Al-Hajj and Lavers, 1973; 5.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 6.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

von Uechtritz (1893) all had the Benue and Fombina as their main objective, and not Borno.⁵⁷⁶ In 1885, Flegel was sent up the Benue waterways with the aim of pushing German claims in Fombina and Sokoto, but a British commercial treaty with Sokoto forestalled that mission.⁵⁷⁷ This, it seems, dampened the morale of the Germans in pushing their claims in the area.

The Germans had a late start in the race for Lake Chad. Borno, it seems, was never their main objective. It was not until the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884 that the Germans, insistently prompted by a new Colonial Society, began to show interest in the race for Lake Chad.⁵⁷⁸ In 1893, the Germans entered into a treaty with the British which allowed them to push their Cameroonian coastal possessions into the hinterland as far as Lake Chad unimpeded. For the Germans, this was an important recognition of their claims over substantial territory in which they had no effective control. For the British, the presence of the Germans between the Yedseram and Shari rivers had the effect of erecting a buffer between them and the French. This arrangement was confirmed by a Franco-German treaty of 1894.⁵⁷⁹

In fact, by 1894 the Germans had given up any hope of penetrating the hinterland and were concentrating on their southern possessions.⁵⁸⁰ It was not until 1898 that the Germans thought it necessary to commence the push northward to effectively occupy their Lake Chad territory.⁵⁸¹

In matters concerning Rabih, the Germans and the British had co-operated against the French. This was basically because of the active and widespread French presence in the Lake Chad basin. By December 1893, the

⁵⁷⁶ Kirk-Greene, 1958: 31-35.

⁵⁷⁷ Foreign Office (U.K.), 1963: 18.

⁵⁷⁸ Adeleye, 1970b: 400.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*:401.

⁵⁸⁰ Kirk-Greene, 1958: 79.

⁵⁸¹ PRO, CO 446/2, Lascelles to FO, July 7, 1898. Incl. Extract of *Deutsche Kolonial Zeitung* of July 7, 1898.

German government had been informed of the British moves to communicate with Rabih by despatching envoys with introductory letters from Zubair Pasha. These letters urged Rabih to co-operate with the British and the Germans against the French.⁵⁸² Indeed, as far as Euro-Borno diplomacy was concerned, the Germans were active non-participants. They were, at best, adjuncts of British policy towards Rabih. In fact, they did not set foot on Borno soil until two years after the demise of Rabih Fadl Allah; when Lt. Pavel marched from Garua and hoisted the German flag at Dikwa, with the assistance of the French on 21 April 1902.⁵⁸³

Rabih had, by his hectoring diplomacy and involvement with the Mahdist movement and its local agents, earned the hostility of Borno's neighbours who otherwise might have welcomed his resistance to European invasion of African territories. Similarly, his pursuit of empire also pitched him in direct confrontation with advancing European imperialism. He was isolated from both African states and their European invaders.

⁵⁸² PRO, FO 403/187, Earl of Roseberg to FO, December 18, 1893.

⁵⁸³ PRO, FO 403/326, Lascelles to FO, September 10, 1902.

Chapter Six

The Fall of Rabih and British Occupation

Prelude to Lakhta

Rabih Fadl Allah withdrew from western and metropolitan Borno in 1897, following the arrival of the French along river Shari. This European appearance on his eastern frontier was to cause him enormous anxiety and engage his attention to his death in 1900.

The arrival of an advance guard of the Gentil mission under Bretonnet to the Shari valley, in 1898, marked the beginning of the military phase of French occupation of Baghirmi, and, of Rabih's end. Rabih who had been taken by surprise by this sudden European appearance on his eastern frontier, in 1897, now kept a close watch on that corridor. This time he was aware of the arrival of the Bretonnet mission.⁵⁸⁴ The movements of this mission in the Shari-Logone area pushed Rabih into action. Bretonnet's message to Rabih's outposts at Kuno that he had no hostile intentions towards him was not enough to convince Rabih.⁵⁸⁵ Rabih knew that European powers did not keep promises with weak parties, he still remembered the destruction of Sulayman Zubair by the forces of Romollo Gessi in treacherous circumstances in 1879.

By July 1899, Bretonnet was convinced Rabih would go on the offensive. The French column of 44 soldiers commanding three mountain guns, therefore, withdrew to the nearby Niellim hills as they found their position around Kuno indefensible with such a small force against the might of Rabih. The French were supported by numerous Baghirmi soldiers under their ruler, Abdurahman Gwaranga. Rabih on the other hand had eleven banners with 2,700 guns and a large army of irregulars armed with spears, bows and

⁵⁸⁴ Adeleye, 1970b: 402.

⁵⁸⁵ Joubert, 1953: 9.

arrows.⁵⁸⁶ The Rabih forces left Kuno at dawn on 17th July 1899, and reaching the Niellim hills immediately launched a frontal attack. This was soon repulsed by the French who had taken an advantageous position on top of the hills; the base was covered by Gwaranga's forces. Rabih re-grouped his forces into three columns: remaining at the centre, he sent Muhammad Nyebe and Faki Ahmad al-Kabir to attack the left flank while Uthman wad Shakku was detailed to do the same on the right flank.⁵⁸⁷ In Shakku's first sortie, Capt. Braun was killed and Bretonnet wounded. Lt. Martin continued to direct the French attack. Gwaranga, shot in the arm, fled with his forces when the battle became too hot.⁵⁸⁸ Muhammad Nyebe and Faki Ahmad al-Kabir gained the defile killing Lt. Durand-Autier and all men on that flank. Bretonnet received a second bullet and died. The French were annihilated,⁵⁸⁹ but even for the victor it was a costly victory. Rabih lost sixty three senior officers, five hundred soldiers and numerous irregulars.⁵⁹⁰

When Gentil got news of the massacre of the Mission Bretonnet at Gaura, renamed Fort Archambault by the French, he decided to garrison the town with Capt. Julien's company and two 65 mm pieces of artillery under the command of Capt. Robillot.⁵⁹¹ Meanwhile Gentil had no information as to Gwaranga's whereabouts having fled from the battle-field and without the latter's support, he knew his position was precarious more so as Rabih had taken the initiative.

Rabih on his part waited at Kuno and despatched Faki Ahmad al-Kabir with six banners to Laye, to secure

⁵⁸⁶ Gentil, 1902: 126; Decorse and Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 1902: 21.

⁵⁸⁷ Hallam, 1977: 245.

⁵⁸⁸ Adeleye, 1970b: 412.

⁵⁸⁹ The French losses included: Bretonnet, Capt. Braun, Lt. Durand-Autier, Lt. Martin, Pouret, Chabka, Hassan, and 44 soldiers.

⁵⁹⁰ Joubert, 1953: 9.

⁵⁹¹ Hallam, 1977: 248.

supplies for the troops, and cut off Gwaranga's line of communication from the French.⁵⁹² Gentil left Fort Archambault on 23 October 1899, having known that part of Rabih's troops had gone to watch Gwaranga's movements.⁵⁹³ The French, now made up of three companies, comprising 344 rifles, two 80 mm and one 65 mm guns, one 37 mm rapid firer, and a 37 mm Hotchkiss, decided to go on the offensive. Rabih had with him five banners, the six that went towards Laye not having returned, but had a re-enforcement of auxiliaries from the Kotoko principalities of Afade, Gulfei, Kusseri, and the Kotoko population of Dikwa. These were mostly spearmen and cavalry, with seventy war canoes and 850 spearmen from Kusseri alone.⁵⁹⁴

The battle of Kuno, joined on October 29, 1899, lasted for about nine hours. It was a hotly contested and inconclusive battle. Each side lost heavily and claimed victory. The French lost 46 killed, 106 wounded and were therefore temporarily out of action. In proportion to their strength of 344 men, this loss was quite large.⁵⁹⁵ Rabih's losses were equally enormous. These included prominent and experienced banner commanders, such as Arbab Babikir wad Hamad,⁵⁹⁶ Uthman wad Shakku,⁵⁹⁷ and Ahmad wad Brahim, 78 soldiers and innumerable auxiliaries.⁵⁹⁸ The high casualty and logistic problems, especially shortage of food and ammunition, forced Gentil to withdraw to Fort Archambault. An important consequence of the battle of

⁵⁹² Joubert, 1953: 9; Hallam, 1977: 248-9; Babikir, 1950: 88.

⁵⁹³ Gentil, 1902: 138.

⁵⁹⁴ Joubert, 1953: 7-10; Babikir, 1950: 88; Hallam 1977: 249 and fn. 57.

⁵⁹⁵ Gentil, 1902: 163.

⁵⁹⁶ Died on the way to Manjaffa of wounds received at Kuno and was buried at Logone.

⁵⁹⁷ *Agit al-Bahr*, Governor of Kusseri and commander of Shari garrisons.

⁵⁹⁸ Babikir, 1950: 89; Hallam, 1977: 251.

Kuno was that Rabih lost Baghirmi for good.⁵⁹⁹

With the death of Uthman wad Shakku at Kuno, Rabih despatched Fadl Allah, late in 1899, to take over command of the Shari garrisons. He was also entrusted with the task of cutting the routes of the various French missions.⁶⁰⁰ When the Foureau-Lamy mission reached the vicinity of Gulfei on January 24th, 1900, Fadl Allah was already there along with Gadim and 300 - 400 soldiers.⁶⁰¹ In order to monitor the movements of the French and succeed in breaking their lines of communication, Fadl Allah erected outposts along the whole stretch of the lower Shari. It was for this reason that Taha and the 25th banner was located at Mara.⁶⁰²

The French now intensified the pressure on Rabih. Mara was attacked on February 17th and in the process Taha was killed. By February 20th, the combined team of the two missions under Major Lamy had occupied the town.⁶⁰³ On March 2nd, they left Mara and took Kusseri, killing Bishara Khuraj, and many soldiers of the 19th banner holding the town.⁶⁰⁴

Kusseri had been a major French military objective because of its strategic location and importance to Rabih's defence system. Gulfei, Logone, and Dikwa were all easily accessible from Kusseri. Kusseri was, therefore, in the very heart of Rabih's defence system. The French knew that the fall of Kusseri would seriously hamper Rabih's defence, communications, and supply networks. Kuno was a setback but Kusseri was a disaster. It was, from the military point of view, the beginning of the end of Rabih.

On getting information of the fall of Kusseri, Fadl Allah sent message informing his father and set out with a

⁵⁹⁹ Adeleye, 1970b: 413.

⁶⁰⁰ Joubert, 1953: 10; Hallam, 1977: 263.

⁶⁰¹ Foureau, 1902: 674.

⁶⁰² Joubert, 1953: 10.

⁶⁰³ Joubert, 1953: 10; Joalland, 1930: 174.

⁶⁰⁴ Joalland, 1930: 174; Joubert, 1953: 10; Gentil, 1902: 202; Babikir, 1902: 90.

large force towards the town.⁶⁰⁵ Fadl Allah burnt the village of Kabe, about 11 kilometres to the south of Kusseri, on 8th March, and engaged the French but was defeated in open field encounters. In this engagement, he lost Aji Gambo and Kapsur al-Banda, two prominent banner commanders.⁶⁰⁶

The Battle of Lakhta

On receiving information of the fall of Kusseri and the subsequent defeat of Fadl Allah, Rabih hurriedly left Dikwa, placing it under the command of Muhammad Nyebe, who had been wounded at the battle of Niellim, and Faki Ahmad al-Kabir. Rabih reached the fortified village of Lakhta on river Shari, about five kilometres from Kusseri, on April 11th, 1900. For what turned out to be his last stand, Rabih reverted to his usual strategy of choosing the battle field, digging in and awaiting attack with thirteen banners: consisting of 5,000 troops, 2,000 with fire arms, three mountain guns captured from the battle of Niellim and numerous auxiliaries.⁶⁰⁷ Expectedly, Rabih dug entrenchments to the east of Lakhta. The eastern side was covered by thick vegetation while to the north-east lay river Shari.⁶⁰⁸ The rear and left flanks covered by thick forest, however, allowed the enemy to advance unobserved. The front was cleared to a few hundred metres to create an allowance for rifle fire.⁶⁰⁹

Rabih kept on harassing French outposts around Kusseri such that Major Lamy had to withdraw into the town to avoid a precipitate engagement. Once inside Kusseri the French found themselves in a difficult position. Food as well as ammunition was in short supply.⁶¹⁰ This was the

⁶⁰⁵ Joubert, 1953: 10.

⁶⁰⁶ Hallam, 1977: 266.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*; Babikir, 1950: 92; Adeleye, 1970b: 413.

⁶⁰⁸ Hallam, 1977: 268.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*; Foureau, 1902: 811.

⁶¹⁰ Hallam, 1977: 269.

situation in Lamy's camp when Gentil arrived with re-enforcement and supplies and placed his troops under the command of Major Lamy on April 21st, 1900. The *rendezvous du Tchad* had been completed. All the three French columns were formed into a single column of 700 riflemen, 30 cavaliers, and 1500 Baghirmi soldiers under the overall command of Major Lamy.

Rabih apprehended his difficulty. He had, from his experiences of the battles of Niellim and Kuno, come to appreciate the destructive power of melinite shells and controlled rifle fire, which the French had. He had in the Central Sudan used the same power over vastly, numerically, superior armies such as those of Borno and Baghirmi. Yet he knew that the French had withdrawn at Kuno due to shortage of ammunition. Unaware of the arrival of the Gentil column with re-enforcement and supplies, his strategy was to provoke the French to come out of Kusseri and attack his position, allow them expend their limited stock of ammunition and then launch a swift counter-attack.⁶¹¹

The French filed out of Kusseri at dawn on April 22nd, 1900 in three parallel columns.⁶¹² The right column under Joalland followed the banks of the Shari with their transport animals bringing up the rear. On the left flank Reibell commanded a column made up of Algerian spahis. Robillot commanded the central column, closely followed by Lamy, Gentil, Gwaranga and his Baghirmi forces. The French strategy was for Joalland to attack Rabih's left flank through the thickly forested area. Reibell was to move swiftly around the west and the north in an enveloping movement. Reibell was to be given enough time to complete the enveloping motion by cutting off Rabih's retreat, after which the central column was to launch a determined

⁶¹¹ *Ibid*: 268.

⁶¹² The account of this battle *vide*: Gentil, 1902: 188-220; Foureau, 1902: 811-2; Joalland, 1931: 175; Babikir, 1950: 92-3; Joubert, 1937: 10; Hallam, 1977: 270- 2.

frontal attack.

Rabih's army had no idea of how close the enemy was. They were outside the stockades and were not expecting a fight when they sighted the French advance. They rushed back to the stockaded area to take position when the French started shelling their positions. Joalland attacked according to plan, but meeting strong opposition on that side, was not able to complete his movement as swiftly as envisaged to cut off Rabih's rear. Robillot, believing enough time had elapsed for Joalland to achieve his objective, launched his frontal offensive and succeeded in making an opening in the stockade. Rabih's troops abandoned their positions and fled under heavy and unceasing French fire. As Lamy now rode into the centre of the stockade, Rabih and his bodyguard banners approached unobserved and launched a renewed attack. The French were completely surprised. Major Lamy received a bullet in the chest and fell mortally wounded, de Cointet was killed, and Chambrun wounded. Robillot and his men came to their rescue and the enemy fled. In the ensuing pursuit of the fleeing forces, Rabih, who had been wounded and was hiding under a stockade, was shot and his head cut off.

By mid-day the battle was over. Both Rabih and Lamy were dead. The French losses included Capt. de Cointet, nineteen African soldiers killed, and forty three wounded.⁶¹³ On Rabih's side about a thousand soldiers had been killed including banner commanders: Razak Allah, Hamaden, Gadim, and Yusuf Babikir al Mandarati. Rabih's head was taken to Kusseri and displayed.⁶¹⁴ Rabih had been defeated but there were Fadl Allah and Nyebe at Logone and Dikwa, with formidable forces to contend with. The French had won but they equally knew how precarious their position was, owing to their limited stock of ammunition; they could not withstand a determined attack should Fadl Allah decide to launch one.

⁶¹³ Adeleye, 1970b: 413; Hallam, 1977: 272 fn 50.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Gentil, 1902: 221.

A number of reasons accounted for the French defeat of Rabih. First was French superiority in firepower. They took great advantage of the destructive power of their artillery and comparatively modern rifles. Second, they had a large quantity of ammunition at their disposal. At this battle alone, the French fired 32,000 cartridges and 94 shells.⁶¹⁵ Moreover the French had unlimited reserve and resources. They could call reserves from Bangui or even beyond while Rabih had all his resources committed in the Chad basin. Third, Rabih had, because of persistent French harassment, been made to divide his forces into various small units. There were still some strong units at Logone and Dikwa. In his usual style Rabih went to war without committing all his resources. Fourth, the French enjoyed local support among the Baghirmi and Borno peoples. *Mbang Gwaranga* and *Shehu Umar Sanda Kura* all took part in the battle.⁶¹⁶

Fadl Allah and the French

The rump of Rabih's army soon joined Fadl Allah at Logone. Fadl Allah decided to team up with those forces under Muhammed Nyebe at Dikwa. Though Fadl Allah was aware of French difficulties at this time, the resounding defeat and death of his father had shocked him and demoralised the troops. Lavers attributed Fadl Allah's inability to fight on to Rabih's advice to his sons to avoid confronting the French and seek their fortunes with the British upon his death.⁶¹⁷

Fadl Allah reached Dikwa on April 23rd to meet Nyebe who had already heard of their father's defeat. On April 30th Fadl Allah, having learnt that the French were advancing on Dikwa and had already reached Worsele,

⁶¹⁵ Hallam, 1977: 272.

⁶¹⁶ Adeleye, 1970b: 414.

⁶¹⁷ Lavers, 1994: 218-9.

abandoned the town. The decision to abandon Dikwa was based on their perception of their low morale and weakened position. The fleeing army took what they could of their treasure, ammunition, food and left for the Gamerghu territory.⁶¹⁸ Whatever was left behind was subjected to two days of general looting by the inhabitants of Dikwa and environs. Nyebe led the advance guard leaving with the women, children, and stores. Fadl Allah waited until he received news of the near approach of the French.⁶¹⁹

The fleeing army arrived Dogumba that evening, most of the laggards and women being cut off by the Shuwa-Arabs who had either decamped to the French or were acting on their own account. Fadl Allah rested at Dogumba. The French were delayed at Dikwa by an explosion at Rabih's arsenal, which had equally sparked off fire in the neighbourhood. The French left Dikwa shortly before midnight on May 1st and, marching all night, caught up with Fadl Allah at dawn. The 160 strong French force reached Fadl Allah's camp unobserved and attacked.⁶²⁰

Fadl Allah's forces disengaged and fled after a brief skirmish. Their losses were great. Ten banners, the bulk of their ammunition including three hundred guns, about 10,000 Maria Theresa dollars, Fadl Allah's two wives Hadjia and Niarinzhe⁶²¹ and his two children, Mahmud and Abdul Majid, were captured. The wives and children of most officers were equally captured.⁶²² Faki Ahmad al-Kabir, who had lost two sons early on in the fight, made a suicidal jump into French line of fire and was cut down.⁶²³ In addition, large quantities of grains and five hundred cattle were also seized.⁶²⁴ The large number of prisoners captured at

⁶¹⁸ Kalle, 1919.

⁶¹⁹ Lavers, 1994: 222.

⁶²⁰ Zeltner, 1988: 220.

⁶²¹ Niarinzhe was Crampel's woman captured after the massacre of mission Crampel at Dar Kuti in 1891.

⁶²² Gentil, 1902: 232; Reibell, 1931: 344.

⁶²³ Gentil, 1902: 231; Reibell, 1931: 344; Zeltner, 1988: 220.

⁶²⁴ Reibell, 1931: 344.

Dogumba hindered the French pursuit. Reibell waited at Dogumba, awaiting the arrival of medical personnel following injuries sustained by Dr. Haller, and re-enforcements from Dikwa.

Fadl Allah and his men moved southward persistently harassed by the Gamerghu along their route. As the French pursuit slowed, they equally slowed their pace to allow some of their men who might have escaped from the French to join them. On May 15th, a French reconnaissance squad was seen and repelled around Madebe.⁶²⁵ Reibell, now re-enforced and commanding a force of 148 men and a 42 mm Hotchkiss, intensified the pursuit. Their pursuit was, however, slowed down by heavy downpour at Kawuri, which place they reached on May 6th. They moved to Madebe the following day to find out that Fadl Allah had evacuated his camp in the morning. The French made a forced march and, moving a distance of 150 kilometres in two days, reached Fadl Allah's camp at Isge.⁶²⁶

Fadl Allah who was trying to establish camp was surprised by the French at Dogumba. It was a complete disaster for the pursued as many people including Bandas Al-Kra'ashi were killed. Two banners, two pieces of artillery, and 100 guns were annihilated, while innumerable women and children were captured.⁶²⁷ Those who escaped fled westwards to Mubi.⁶²⁸ From Isge, Reibell ceased the pursuit, believing that Fadl Allah had been sufficiently incapacitated and forced into unfriendly territory. The French withdrew northwards *en route* Dikwa on May 13th.⁶²⁹

As mentioned earlier, Dikwa had been subjected to two days of looting after the evacuation of Fadl Allah. Reibell now attempted to restore normalcy to the town. While here, Shaykh Dahab and Sharif Ijele, the Shuwa-Arab

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.* 346.

⁶²⁷ Cf. Hallam, 1977: 278.

⁶²⁸ Zeltner, 1988: 220.

⁶²⁹ Reibell, 1931: 347.

commanders of Rabih's 11th and 20th banners respectively, came in to surrender.⁶³⁰

The Emergence of Umar Sanda b. Ibrahim

With Fadl Allah far from Dikwa at Mubi, *Shehu* Umar Sanda b. Ibrahim, known to history as Sanda Kura, who had been installed at Bagara by a large Bornu population keenly watched by the Foureau mission in January 1900, arrived and took up residence as *Shehu* on June 5th, 1900. *Shehu* Sanda Kura's following had increased considerably as he approached Dikwa because of the large number of people who had come to welcome him. The new *Shehu* had already received French recognition formally when it became convenient for the French to do so. On arrival at Kusseri the French position with regard to Rabih became complicated due to treaty obligations between the European powers, as the French needed authorization to enter "German" territory to fight Rabih. At this stage the French found Umar Sanda's support very useful. They advised Gwaranga to protest to the *Shehu* to check the actions of Rabih in his territory from invading Gwaranga's country. Gwaranga, who had no power to do so, asked his allies, the French, to assist upon which Gentil authorised the destruction of Rabih wherever he could be found.

Umar Sanda Kura was followed to Dikwa by Gentil, forty African soldiers, and a column of the new French irregular cavalry.⁶³¹ The French now imposed a levy of 30,000 Maria Theresa dollars as payment for their rôle in the defeat of Rabih.⁶³² The *Shehu*, either out of gratitude to the French for the removal of the Rabih yoke over Bornu or

⁶³⁰ *Ibid:* 348.

⁶³¹ Lavers, 1994: 12.

⁶³² NAK, SNP 15/1 Acc. 18 Bornu Report BM/8 of 1st May 1902 by Col. Morland, Commandant W.A.F.F. Incl. B.ii "The French and Bornu" as stated by Shehu Garbai. Also in PRO, FO 403/326, Lugard to CO, May 12, 1901. Incl. no. 2 in no. 34, Report by Col. Morland. Henceon Morland, 1901.

out of genuine appreciation of his weakness, sent his agents to start collecting the levy from an already impoverished Borno populace.⁶³³

The French also made an additional demand on the *Shehu*; they asked the *Shehu* to allow them to drive the Shuwa-Arabs living in Borno to the east of Lake Chad.⁶³⁴ The *Shehu*, though unhappy with the Shuwa-Arabs for flocking *en masse* to Rabih on arrival in 1893 and who even now reserved their loyalty to Fadl Allah rather than the *Shehu*, knew as did the French that, the Shuwa-Arabs as a people were economically very important to the state, as they owned enormous wealth in form of cattle. The *Shehu*, therefore, outrightly refused this new French demand.⁶³⁵ For this refusal and lack of enthusiasm in paying the French "debt", after paying 9,000 Maria Theresa dollars, the French deposed him and in his place put his younger brother, Abubakar Garbai b. Ibrahim, better known as, Bukar Garbai. To make Garbai comfortable, the French deported Umar Sanda Kura along with his brother Ahmad Rufai to the Congo in October 1900.⁶³⁶

After installing Garbai as the new *Shehu*, the French withdrew from Dikwa, leaving Capt. Robillot to collect the balance of their "debt" from Garbai. The fee was now raised by an additional 50,000 Maria Theresa dollars, probably for helping Garbai to supplant his elder brother. However, there is no evidence that even the malleable Garbai had accepted the French demand to drive the Shuwa-Arabs out of Borno into their sphere.⁶³⁷ This French policy of imposing a high levy on the *Shehu* and calling for the relocation of the Shuwa-Arabs was, according to Hallam, designed to induce the *Shehu* to begin excessive taxation so soon after the demise of Rabih and make the Borno people escape across

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁵ Tukur, 1979: 103.

⁶³⁶ Morland, 1901.

⁶³⁷ Tukur, 1979: 104.

the border into the French sphere.⁶³⁸ In this process the French wanted to re-populate their vast territory at the expense of Borno, and weaken her.⁶³⁹

Fadl Allah, Shehu Garbai and the Europeans

At Mubi, Fadl Allah overhauled his troops now seriously depleted by persistent French attacks. By July 1900, his army was reported by Lugard to stand at 5,000 men, 2,700 guns, and a thousand horses.⁶⁴⁰ His basic problem was food for the army. This acute shortage of food forced many to desert and move to Yola. Arriving Yola with their arms, they were warmly received by a Fadl Allah-hostile *Lamido* Zubairu, who not long afterwards used them against the British.⁶⁴¹ This massive desertion forced Fadl Allah to move away from Fombina territory towards Borno.⁶⁴² While at Mubi, Fadl Allah had received a letter from the French brought in by Sharif Muhammad Salih,⁶⁴³ asking him to come and submit to the French.⁶⁴⁴ Shortly after, before moving northwards, Fadl Allah wrote to W. P. Hewby, the British "Resident" at Ibi, asking for British protection. It seems Sharif Muhammad Salih had equally advised him that seeking British assistance was a better option. Fadl Allah wrote *inter alia*:⁶⁴⁵

I belong to you on account of your relations with
my father and on account of your acquaintance

⁶³⁸ Hallam, 1977: 280.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁰ PRO CO 446/11, Lugard to CO, October 2, 1900.

⁶⁴¹ Abubakar, 1977: 146.

⁶⁴² PRO, CO 446/15, Fadl Allah to W. P. Hewby, January 31, 1901. Letter B.

⁶⁴³ One of the Egyptian envoys sent to Rabih Fadl Allah by the British in the 1890s.

⁶⁴⁴ Reibell, 1931: 346-7.

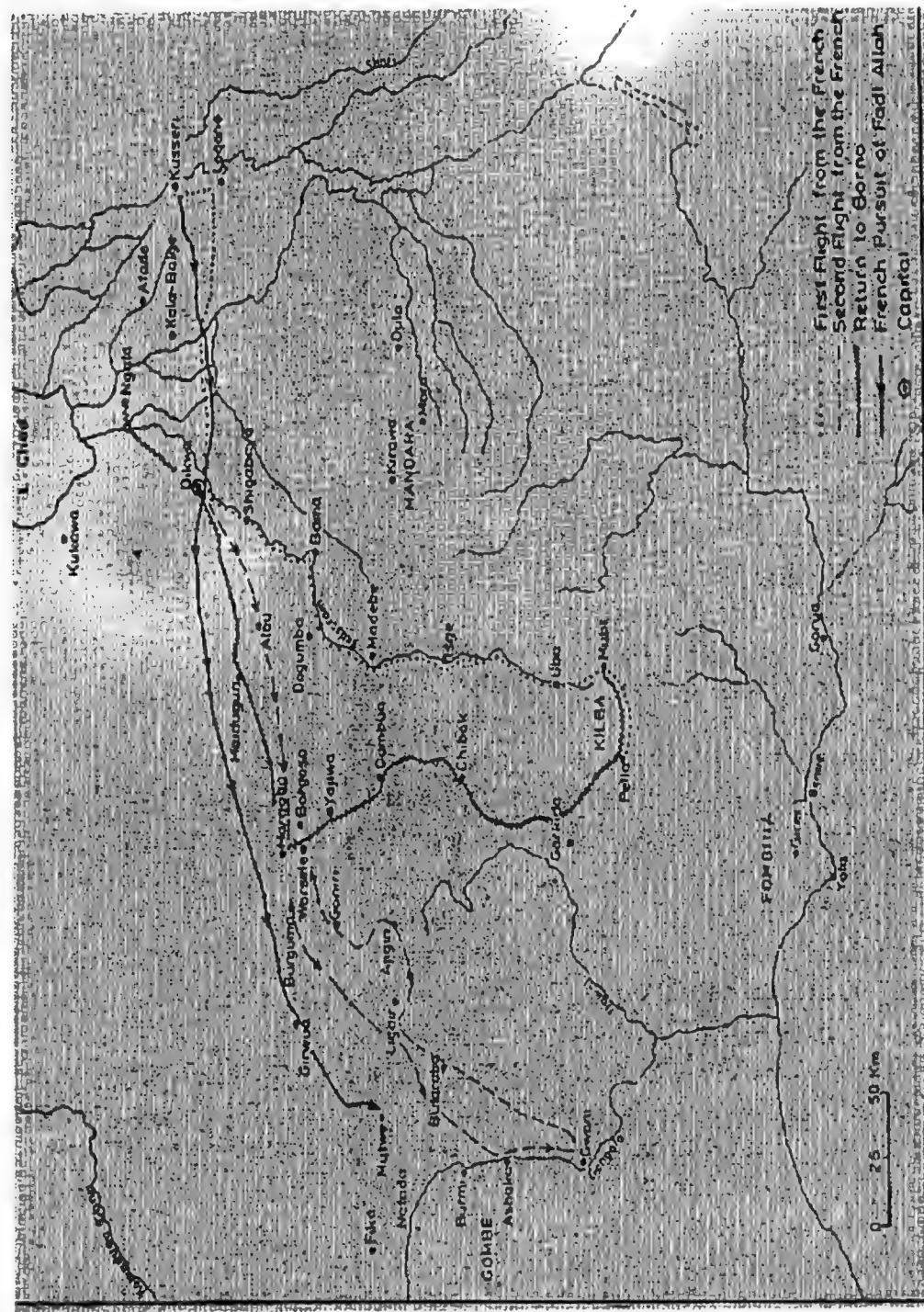
⁶⁴⁵ PRO, CO 446/11, Lugard to CO, October 2, 1900. Incl. Fadl Allah to Hewby.

with Sheriff Mohammed Salih and El-Hajj Mohammed Liman. The French fought with my father for 3 months, when God gave them the power to kill him. They also met me in battle 3 times so that I fled Bornu leaving it to them. I have come here on account of you of whom my father had advised me saying that in the event of his defeat by the French, this was my best course, and that you would help me. These French from Baghirmi are still attempting to harass me. I and my people are looking to you and no other, so that I sent this privately to you, my people and only God being aware of it. I beg for your assistance for my self and my father's people and property remaining to me, for they are pursuing me and driving me from Bornu and from Bagirmi, this French who are to you (English) as the breeze.

Please send my messenger back quickly so that I can know my future and if I can come into your territory. I wish to come near you [note: this part is not very clear to trans.] [...] I am awaiting God's will.

Salaam.

**Map 3: Scene of Fadl Allah's activities,
April 1900-August 1901**



Fadl Allah's letter reached Ibi on August 4th and had been translated by the 11th. For the British, greatly disturbed by French disregard for their "territory", and who for long had nursed the ambition of occupying Borno without having to fight with its rulers, Fadl Allah's letter was very important. They had tried and failed in this enterprise with both Hashimi and Rabih. In a bid to use Fadl Allah for this purpose, Hewby replied Fadl Allah with two letters. The short and less important one informed him that Hewby had sent his request to Lugard, and advised him to send Muhammad Nyebe or a messenger towards the end of September to receive Lugard's response.⁶⁴⁶

The other letter was calculated to affect Fadl Allah's attitude towards the French and the French appointed *Shehu* of Borno. Hewby wrote viz:⁶⁴⁷

[...] I hear from you how the French have pursued you into Marghi territory. They have no right to do this. The eastern boundary of British territory is a line from Faro river by Mubi, Dikwa to Ngala. If you keep to the westward of that line you are under British protection.

By this letter, Hewby had deliberately granted Fadl Allah British protection. The British were now bent on using Fadl Allah's vast military capacity to check French encroachment on their sphere and take over Borno. Henceforth, Fadl Allah acted as a British subject, awaiting British recognition as ruler of "British" Borno.

Arri [Ali], Fadl Allah's courier who carried the letters, was accompanied on his return trip by Hewby's messenger, Abaji. They took a much longer route crossing the river Benue at Garua and, passing through Sorau and Mubi, arrived Fadl Allah's camp at Pella in Kilba-land.⁶⁴⁸ The

⁶⁴⁶ Lavers, 1994: 228.

⁶⁴⁷ Hewby to Fadl Allah, August 11, 1900 as cited by Lavers, 1994: 16.

⁶⁴⁸ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901, Incl. an

journey took forty four days. They had to take this long route as *Lamido* Zubairu had blocked to them the shorter route passing through Fombina at Girei.⁶⁴⁹

On October 24th, some twenty days after the arrival of Arri and Abaji with Hewby's replies, Fadl Allah moved out of Kilba-land towards Borno, in part due to shortage of food and in part due to his new found knowledge of "British" boundary and British friendliness. It was only when they reached Kibaku-land that Abaji realised that they were Borno bound; he at first thought they were going to Gateri from where they would send him off to Ibi.⁶⁵⁰ While here, they had an inconclusive engagement with the Kibaku, an action in which Hauwa, Rabih's daughter, was said to have fought gallantly dressed as a man.⁶⁵¹ Most settlements on their route such as Danbori, Ajamari, Yajiwa, and Borgoso fled before them. Their advance guard at Angusuri had a skirmish with the inhabitants. Most settlements were raided basically for food.⁶⁵² They reached Marguba towards the end of October 1900.

It was at Marguba that they learnt of the removal of *Shehu* Umar Sanda Kura and the appointment of Bukar Garbai in his place, and that there were a few French officers and twenty five soldiers with Garbai at Dikwa. They also learnt that, on getting information that the British were with Fadl Allah, the French left after announcing that the territory was not French much to the consternation of Garbai.⁶⁵³

Though it was Hewby's reassuring letters and Fadl Allah's new found confidence within "British" territory that made him move towards Marguba, it was the despatch of a

account of Fatarala's proceedings from October 1900-February 1901, as per Abaji, Hewby's messenger to Fadl Allah; Lavers, 1994:228.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ Lavers, 1994: 229 and fn.

⁶⁵² PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

Borno force under Mustrema Musa to Maiduguri by Garbai, and Garbai's appointment as *Shehu* that finally pushed Fadl Allah to fight. It seems Fadl Allah had nothing but contempt for Garbai, with whom he had lived for the preceding six years at Dikwa. Fadl Allah had serious doubts about Garbai's ability to fight. Similarly, Fadl Allah was determined to keep the *Shehu*-ship of Borno vacant, pending the determination of his request by the British. It seems the British had hinged their recognition of him on his ability to keep the position vacant. Leaving the women, children and baggage at Marguba, Fadl Allah's troops made a night march and arrived at Maiduguri⁶⁵⁴ in the morning of November 26, 1900.⁶⁵⁵ The two forces joined battle and in less than an hour the Borno forces under Mustrema Musa were routed. Fadl Allah burnt and abandoned Maiduguri two days later.⁶⁵⁶

Emboldened now by his easy victory over Mustrema Musa and aware of French withdrawal from Dikwa, Fadl Allah marched on Dikwa. He entered Dikwa unopposed on November 30th; *Shehu* Garbai burnt the town and fled to Ngala on hearing of the advance.⁶⁵⁷ *Shehu* Garbai, who was aware of Fadl Allah's advance, had written to the French as early as November 24th seeking their assistance against him.⁶⁵⁸

From Dikwa, Fadl Allah wrote *Shehu* Garbai, informing him that, being a French-appointed *Shehu*, he

⁶⁵⁴ This was a separate quarter of Maiduguri, now known as old Maiduguri, distinct from the administrative capital that grew out of Yerwa, Kalwa, Maifoni and numerous other settlements. The movement of the *Shehu* there in 1907 and the siting of the provincial headquarters led to its phenomenal growth. See, Seidensticker, 1983: 5-16.

⁶⁵⁵ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901; Robillot, 1902:157.

⁶⁵⁸ A.N.S.O.M., Gabon Congo VII/15, Robillot à Gentil, December 13, 1900.

had no authority in "British" territory and if he doubted this, then he should follow him to the British and find out. *Shehu* Garbai, angered by Fadl Allah's contempt for him, had his two messengers executed.⁶⁵⁹ In the interim, Robillot replied Garbai's letter asking him to cross to the French post with his men and take refuge there.⁶⁶⁰ This the *Shehu* turned down, saying he would make his dying stand at Ngala.⁶⁶¹ It seems Garbai refused the French offer for two reasons. One, accepting it would mean conceding "British" Borno to Fadl Allah, and second, he feared the imposition of a new levy on him by the French.

After staying at Dikwa for eleven days, Fadl Allah marched on to Ngala on December 6th, 1900.⁶⁶² On his way he had met three mounted Garbai scouts, and had one shot while the other two escaped.⁶⁶³ Garbai was, therefore, well informed about Fadl Allah's approach. Garbai took position and deployed his men on a single line of about 600 - 800 yards with guns centre to left and spears on the right.⁶⁶⁴ Garbai's troops made the first sally but were repulsed. Fadl Allah's right flank was about to cave in but the other flanks came to its rescue. After about three hours of fighting the Borno forces broke and fled with Garbai himself being hotly pursued through the town. The *Shehu* escaped to Kanem. Fadl Allah lost four men and Garbai had left over three hundred men on the field.⁶⁶⁵ Ngala was burnt and a lot of prisoners captured. The Hausa among them were freed,

⁶⁵⁹ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

⁶⁶⁰ A.N.S.O.M., Gabon Congo VII/15, Robillot à Gentil, December 13, 1900.

⁶⁶¹ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ On account of this and previous battles fought here, and the large Borno casualty, Ngala is still remembered as *Bula bu fitaye* (town for shedding blood). Interview, Alhaji Grema Bukar, 25.05. 1993.

presumably because they were seen as "British" subjects.⁶⁶⁶

The French got the news of the defeat of Garbai from fugitives who had fled from Ngala and taken refuge at the French post.⁶⁶⁷ It was also at this time that Robillot learnt of Fadl Allah's execution of messengers he had sent to him. Fadl Allah obviously killed Robillot's messengers as retaliation for Garbai's execution of his messengers, since he knew the French and Garbai to be working against him. While here, Fadl Allah sent word to the various Shuwa-Arab groups who had taken refuge with the French to come over if they wanted British rule, those in the neighbourhood of Kusseri rebuffed him and Fadl Allah seized 3,000 head of cattle from them.⁶⁶⁸

Capt. Robillot, though still cautious about getting entangled in an "international" controversy by crossing over into "German" and "British" territories, was compelled to act. The execution of his messengers by Fadl Allah, Garbai's plea for aid given in writing, and the massive defection of the Shuwa-Arabs including such local notables as *Shaykh Dahab*, *Lawan Mandilqa*, *Lawan Khalid*, and *Lawan Jabaima*, some of whom had earlier surrendered to the French, were enough reasons for Robillot, who needed little persuasion, to advance on Fadl Allah. Regarding the Shuwa-Arabs, the French dreaded a complete defection if the ongoing trend was left unchecked.⁶⁶⁹

Having decided to act, Robillot acted swiftly. He crossed river Shari to Afade on December 17th, 1900, with 200 soldiers, some artillery, a section of cavalry and sizeable Baghirmi soldiers. They reached Dikwa on December 31st to find out that Fadl Allah had abandoned the place. He had moved to his former camp at Marguba four days earlier. It was while Fadl Allah was at Marguba that *Mai Ngalama*

⁶⁶⁶ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ Lavers, 1994: 22.

⁶⁶⁹ A.N.S.O.M. Gabon Congo VII/15 Robillot à Gentil, December 1, 1900.

Mustafa came in and recovered Ngala inhabitants captured during the battle.⁶⁷⁰

Fadl Allah had no intention of staying at Dikwa at this time as it was too close to Kusseri and he knew that the French would move against him. What he did not know was that the French would pursue him far into "British" territory even after receiving Hewby's assurances and keeping to the boundaries made known to him. In fact, he had consistently made the fact of his friendliness with the British known to anyone who cared to listen; he had told Hewby: "I addressed my people and told them your words with which they agreed".⁶⁷¹

On New Year's Day 1901, news of French movements around Maiduguri had reached Fadl Allah at Marguba. Fadl Allah evacuated Marguba with Nyebe leading the advance party as usual. Fadl Allah and the main body of troops followed later, spending the night at Nyebe's camp of the previous day. Nyebe had been attacked by the people of Goniri who had succeeded in killing eight of his men. Fadl Allah came in time to stop the fight in the light of the more potent danger following them from behind. It was while at Goniri that they heard that the French had entered Marguba. The French now marched rapidly. Leaving Marguba on the 7th of January, passing Goniri and Ajigin on the 9th and 10th. On the 10th January, while resting at Buni, the French attacked.⁶⁷² It was a short and sharp engagement in which Fadl Allah inflicted a severe blow on the French. An officer, Lorine, five soldiers and twenty five auxiliaries were killed.⁶⁷³ Thereafter, Fadl Allah crossed river Gongola at Ashaka to the south on January 15th and retraced his steps two days later, to establish camp at Gwani.⁶⁷⁴ The French continued their pursuit and reached

⁶⁷⁰ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901; Interview, Alhaji Grema Bukar, 25. 05. 93.

⁶⁷¹ PRO, CO 446/15, Fadl Allah to Hewby, Letter B.

⁶⁷² PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

⁶⁷³ Joubert, 1931: 10; Lavers, 1994: 234.

⁶⁷⁴ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

Bularaba after Fadl Allah had passed. Not believing the inhabitants who had told them that Fadl Allah had left, they shelled the town, took some prisoners, and began their retreat.⁶⁷⁵ It was while on their way to Dikwa that their route was blocked by the Shuwa-Arabs of Uda Taib. They had a brief engagement with the Shuwa-Arabs and proceeded. A special punitive expedition under Lt. de Lamothe was organised to deal with the Shuwa-Arabs of Uda Taib. The French returned to Dikwa on January 26th on a mission unaccomplished.

From Gateri Fadl Allah despatched two letters to Hewby on January 31st, 1901. In the first letter he sought the opening of communications to the Benue and intimated him of his desire to visit him.⁶⁷⁶ In the second letter he informed Hewby of his actions since the arrival of Abaji in his camp and assured him that his actions arose from his knowledge of the limits of "British" boundary. He similarly reiterated his initial request to be recognised as ruler of "British" Borno.⁶⁷⁷

The letters carried by Abaji and Fadl Allah's messenger reached Hewby and were translated on March 23rd, 1901. As usual, Hewby forwarded the letters to Acting High Commissioner, William Wallace, as Lugard had proceeded on leave to England.⁶⁷⁸ The British, particularly W. P. Hewby and W. Wallace, saw Fadl Allah's recognition as *Shehu* of Borno as an opportunity to "effectively and cheaply occupy Bornu"⁶⁷⁹ and a means of checking French incursions into their sphere. They reasoned that if Fadl Allah's request was turned down, he might turn to the French, in which case Borno would only be occupied at

⁶⁷⁵ Joubert, 1931: 25.

⁶⁷⁶ PRO, CO 446/15, Fadl Allah to Hewby, Letter A.

⁶⁷⁷ PRO, CO 446/15, Fadl Allah to Hewby, Letter B.

⁶⁷⁸ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

⁶⁷⁹ PRO, CO 446/16, Wallace to Morrogh; Political instructions to the Officer Commanding Fataralla Mission, September 16, 1901.

"great sacrifice of blood and treasure in the future".⁶⁸⁰ Besides, Wallace found Fadl Allah "a very influential man [...] greatly trusted by his redoubtable father" and "a man who 'can'".⁶⁸¹

Once Wallace found him suitable for the rulership of Borno, he sent Major McClintock with half a Company of W.A.F.F. to go and visit Fadl Allah's camp, interview him and assure him of British protection as long as he adhered to the British sphere.⁶⁸² McClintock left Ibi on May 26th, 1901. Shortly before McClintock's departure, Fadl Allah sent Arri with another letter for Hewby, informing him that acute shortage of food had compelled him to move out of Gwani to Fika, adding that he would await Hewby or his representative there even though he still feared the French might attack him.⁶⁸³

Fadl Allah, however, changed his mind about staying at Fika and went to Burguma instead. He chose this place to watch the French and Garbai's movements. McClintock reached Fadl Allah's camp to a rousing welcome. In fact, he was received some 30 kilometres to the camp by 100 horsemen who acted as his escort for the last two days of the march, reaching Burguma on June 26th, 1901.⁶⁸⁴ Three days later Fadl Allah stated his main requests from the British to McClintock. These included: to live at Dikwa and to be taken there by the British, to be ruler of Borno, and British protection against another French attack.⁶⁸⁵ McClintock assured him that he would forward his case to the British government, and indeed, suggested the appointment of Fadl Allah as ruler of Borno "with as little

⁶⁸⁰ PRO, CO 446/15, Wallace to CO, April 12, 1901.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*

⁶⁸³ Fadl Allah to Hewby, Dhul Hijjah, n.d. Received at Ibi on May 19, 1901. The messenger took thirty days to arrive, therefore, it would have been written about April 19th, 1901. See, Lavers, 1994: 238.

⁶⁸⁴ PRO, CO 446/16, McClintock to Wallace, July 28, 1901.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

delay as possible and that at the present he be allowed to live in Dikwa".⁶⁸⁶

McClintock returned to Ibi, carrying a letter from Fadl Allah to Hewby reminding him of his requests and, to emphasise the urgency of the matter, requesting to receive his reply in two months.⁶⁸⁷ As soon as *Shehu* Garbai got wind of McClintock's arrival at Burguma, he sent a letter to him seeking British recognition of him, rather than Fadl Allah, as ruler of Borno. However, his messenger arrived after McClintock had left.⁶⁸⁸ Encouraged by a friendly visit from the British and French withdrawal from Dikwa, Fadl Allah despatched a column under Ide al-Ta'ashi and Garqar Abu Halim against *Shehu* Garbai who fled. The *Shehu* was pursued as far as Kusseri. Garbai once more asked for French assistance against Fadl Allah. Fadl Allah, as mentioned earlier, was bent on making Garbai's position untenable pending British action on his request.

The French themselves, worried by Fadl Allah's military capacity granted Garbai's request as much to secure their position as to help the *Shehu*.⁶⁸⁹ The French marched on to Borno on August 7th, 1901, with a large force under Garbai, 250 gunmen, 100 swordsmen, and one 80mm gun of their own. Appearing through the Afade-Balge route, the French under Destenave surprised the column that drove away Garbai, defeated the column, killing both Ide al-Ta'ashi and Abu Halim, and smashing five banners.⁶⁹⁰ From Dikwa the French organised a pursuit of Fadl Allah under Capt. Dangeville. Meanwhile Fadl Allah had concentrated all his forces around Gujba, but Ali Farjalla who he sent in advance to set up his camp at Gujba had been killed by the inhabitants of the town.⁶⁹¹ Dangeville left Dikwa on August 14th and marching leisurely in order not to exhaust the

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁷ PRO, CO 446/16, McClintock to Wallace, July 28, 1901.

⁶⁸⁸ Morland, 1901.

⁶⁸⁹ Tukur, 1989: 47.

⁶⁹⁰ Hallam, 1977: 288.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

troops, and in the process gathering information on Fadl Allah's movements, reached Girwua on August 22nd, 1901. The following morning the fleeing army, preparing to move on to Mutwe, was attacked by the French. Again it was a complete surprise. In the confusion most of Fadl Allah's soldiers fled towards Mutwe where Nyebe had gone with the advance party. Fadl Allah, who was covering the retreat, was shot in the chest at the outskirts of Gujba. He was mounted on horseback by Yerima Lama⁶⁹² and died on his way to Mutwe, where he was buried by Nyebe.⁶⁹³ The French later dug up his remains, cut off his head, and displayed it on the walls of Dikwa along with those of Ide al-Ta'ashi and Garqar Abu Halim.⁶⁹⁴ With the death of Fadl Allah, the rump of the army surrendered to the French at Gujba. Muhammad Nyebe refused to fight on in spite of Hauwa's insistence to continue the fight.

On McClintock's return to Ibi, British approval for Fadl Allah as *Shehu* of Borno had been granted by London.⁶⁹⁵ As Major McClintock was to proceed on leave, Capt. McCarthy Morrogh was despatched to convey the news to Fadl Allah but on his way at Wase, he learnt of the defeat and killing of Fadl Allah by the French.⁶⁹⁶

In the interim *Shehu* Garbai left a detachment of troops under *Digma* Mammadu at Gujba and returned to Dikwa along with Capt. Dangeville. Dangeville remained at Dikwa with a force of 32 men to collect the balance of their "debt" of 80,000 Maria Theresa dollars from Garbai. The *Shehu* on his part sent out tax collectors to gather these from an already impoverished Borno peasantry.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹² Hogben and Kirk-Greene, 1966: 350.

⁶⁹³ Hallam, 1977: 289.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid*: 290.

⁶⁹⁵ PRO, CO 446/21, FO Minutes, November 5, 1901.

⁶⁹⁶ PRO, CO 446/17, Morrogh to o/c Lokoja, October 31, 1901; CO 446/19, Brief memorandum regarding Fadr el Allah.

⁶⁹⁷ Morland, 1901.

The Restoration of the al-Kanemi Dynasty and British Occupation, 1901-1902

Lugard arrived from leave in England to the news of the defeat and destruction of Fadl Allah by the French in "British" territory. Lugard was enraged by this French disregard for British territorial claims and wasted no time in conveying his disgust to the Colonial Office, urging the British government to take up the matter with its French counterpart. Simultaneously, Lugard sent out the "Lower Bornu Expedition" under the command of Colonel T.N.L. Moreland to occupy Borno. The expedition, comprising thirteen officers, five European non-commissioned officers, three medical officers, 515 African soldiers, four maxim guns, and two 75mm guns, left Ibi on February 3rd, 1902.⁶⁹⁸ Lugard instructed the mission among others:⁶⁹⁹

- I. To march to Gujba (via Bauchi) and locate a garrison in each of these places [sic] and so restore British prestige which must have received a severe blow owing to the reported incursion of the French into the protectorate and their defeat of Fadl Allah after he had been recognised by this government in a friendly manner.
- II. To take full and exhaustive evidence as regards the raids of French over the British frontier more especially this last one: whether (as it was reported) it was provoked by any raid by Fadl Allah's men over the German frontier.
- III. To report the action of the French in British territory, whether they appointed any chiefs [...]
- IV. To ascertain what has become of the

⁶⁹⁸ Hallam, 1977: 296.

⁶⁹⁹ NAK, SNP 15/1, Lugard to Commandant WAFF, December 26, 1901.

remnants of Fadl Allah's force and what can be done with them if in British territory they might perhaps be located near the garrison at Bauchi.

V. Proceeding from Bauchi [...] collect all possible information regarding the best place to locate the garrison and to form the capital of Lower Bornu Province [...] The primary object is to be in close touch with the most powerful local chief. If you find yourself compelled to appoint a chief you will do so on the conditions of the letter of appointment.

VI. You may find it necessary to break the power of Mallam Jiberella or you may find that he is a useful man to recognise as a sub-chief or even as principal chief in Lower Bornu.

Lugard completely ignored Bukar Garbai, of whose existence as *Shehu* at Dikwa he was doubtless aware, in his search for a local chief to recognise.⁷⁰⁰ According to Tukur,⁷⁰¹ Lugard was either not sure that Garbai in "German" territory was available for British recognition, or that he was loathe to recognise someone who had received French protection and had, indeed, assisted in their violation of "British" territory, or both. Garbai on the other hand, though aware of British flirtations with and predisposition towards Fadl Allah, was definitely not aware of Lugard's instructions to the expedition overlooking him and seeking a ruler to recognise in Borno.⁷⁰²

Moreland, however, realised while at Bauchi that the *Shehu* at Dikwa not only regarded himself as the *Shehu* of Borno, but that the chief of Gujba was his subordinate and appointee.⁷⁰³ Moreland arrived Gujba on March 11th, 1902

⁷⁰⁰ Tukur, 1979: 108.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*:109.

⁷⁰³ NAK, SNP 15/1 Acc.18, Bornu Report BM/8 of 1st May, 1902.

to a message from *Digma Mammadu*, the *Shehu's* envoy that the *Shehu* was waiting for him at Maifoni. Notwithstanding Lugard's indifference towards Garbai, Moreland, assessing the situation on ground, could not help but reckon with the *Shehu*. In any case the expedition could not see the rump of Fadl Allah's force as most of the soldiers had surrendered and had been carried away by the French to Fort Lamy while the rest had gone on their own, mostly to Fika. *Mallam Jibril Gaini*, in whom Lugard saw a potential ruler of Borno, instead of coming forth to be recognised by the British as the chief of any place stood firm and distinguished himself as the only person to have resisted British colonial encroachment throughout their long march to Borno.⁷⁰⁴

At Maifoni, Morland was disappointed in not meeting Garbai, who had sent a message that Dangerville, the French officer, would not allow him leave without settling the balance of his "debt" to the French. Morland sent Capt. McCarthy Morrogh to Dikwa to invite Bukar Garbai to meet him at Maifoni. Once Morrogh arrived, Dangerville, realising that Dikwa was "German" territory and that even if he succeeded in disallowing Garbai's movement to Maifoni, Garbai would end up serving another power and not the French, allowed him to move. To make sure that Garbai would return to settle accounts with him, Dangerville made the *Shehu* leave most of his property behind.⁷⁰⁵ *Shehu* Garbai left these under the care of Umar Sanda b. Bukar, better known as, Sanda Mandarama.⁷⁰⁶

Shehu Garbai left for Maifoni accompanied by 300 horsemen and 200 soldiers. The outcome of the meeting between Morland and Garbai was that Garbai accepted British recognition as *Shehu* of Borno. He was appointed on

⁷⁰⁴ Tukur, 1979: 111.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*:112.

⁷⁰⁶ He was *Shehu* at Dikwa between 1902-1905 and 1906-1917. Between 1905 and 1906 he was deposed and exiled by the Germans, lived with *Shehu* Garbai at Monguno, and was re-instated by the same German colonial government in 1906.

April 2nd, 1900.⁷⁰⁷ Capt. McCarthy Morrogh was sent to Dikwa to bring the remnants of Garbai's property but most of these were confiscated by Dangeville. The French on their part installed Umar Sanda (Mandarama) as *Shehu* of "German" Borno at Dikwa before leaving. *Shehu* Garbai, immediately after receiving British recognition, made his intention to be independent of them known.⁷⁰⁸ Thus, even though he anxiously looked forward to Morland's proposal that Kukawa be rebuilt as his capital, he declined the suggestion that he reside at Maifoni in the interim, where there was a British Resident and a garrison. Instead he chose to stay at Monguno which had neither.⁷⁰⁹

By April 21st, 1902, the Germans arrived from Garua and occupied Dikwa. Lt. Pavel's expedition was assisted by the French in hoisting the German flag before withdrawing to the east of river Shari.⁷¹⁰

Rabih Fadl Allah's seven years of ravages and Fadl Allah's one year of peripatetic career had softened Borno sufficiently for European occupation with relative ease. With the defeat and death of Fadl Allah, Borno was left open for occupation, weak and battered, without the military capacity to resist, even if the al-Kanemi rulers were so disposed. In fact, it was treaty obligation between the various European powers that stopped the French from effectively occupying Borno. This is a complete *volte face* from the hard stance taken against the MacIntosh Expedition in 1891.

⁷⁰⁷ NAK, SNP 15/1, Acc.18, Bornu Report BM/8 of 1st May

1902.

⁷⁰⁸ Tukur, 1989: 50.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁰ PRO, FO 403/326, Lascelles to FO, September 10, 1902.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

The closing years of the nineteenth century, especially the last seven years were for Borno one of the most turbulent periods in its entire history. It was undoubtedly the most critical and trying period for the al-Kanemi dynasty. For this was the only time in the long and chequered history of Borno under both the Sayfawa and al-Kanemi dynasties, when the state was taken over by a foreign invader, and its people and their rulers displaced, massacred, enslaved, and subjected to seven years of continuous ravages and depredations.⁷¹¹ In the account already given of Rabih Fadl Allah's conquest and occupation of Borno, certain patterns can be clearly discerned. The battle for the defence of Borno against the foreign invader was lost even before it was joined.

The ruling house, the house of al-Kanemi, which seized power from the Sayfawa in c.1810 but effectively from 1846, was sharply divided, especially as from the 1850s. This division became manifest during the reign of *Shehu Umar*, al-Kanemi's son and successor (1837-53, 1854-81). During this period, due largely to the alienation of a section of the court because of the favoured status enjoyed by the *Waziri*, *Hajj Bashir*, *Abba Abdurahman* with the aid of a section of the palace slaves organised a successful military coup and removed the *Shehu* in 1853. *Shehu Abdurahman*

⁷¹¹ The Bulala wars of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries created political crises, which along with other social and economic factors led to the movement of the Sayfawa rulers from Kanem to Borno. The Fulata rebellion of 1808-9, consequent on the outbreak of the Sokoto *Jihad*, caused the abandonment of Birni Gazargamu as the capital and ultimately the demise of the Sayfawa dynasty. But in none of these instances was there a complete takeover of state power by a foreign invader.

was himself removed a year later through the same method due to his high-handedness and dictatorial disposition, and was subsequently executed. A restored *Shehu* Umar continued to act in his old ways. These two violent changes of government and the loss of lives involved in the process widened the internal division and brought to the fore the disunity within the ruling class. The deep animosity between Umar's successor *Shehu* Bukar (1881-84) and Abba Ibrahim was public knowledge. The succession dispute after the death of *Shehu* Bukar between Abba Masta and Abba Ibrahim culminated in the death of Abba Masta and fuelled the attendant struggle for dominance between the offspring of *Shehu* Bukar and *Shehu* Ibrahim. The struggle between the scions of Bukar and Ibrahim, though temporarily, resolved by *Shehu* Kyari on the eve of the decisive battle of Gashegar against Rabih, in 1894, did last to the end of the battle. This is because the sons of Ibrahim left the battlefield on the first signs of a Bornu victory. A victorious *Shehu* Kyari, they reasoned, was a potent danger to their line.

This deep intra-ruling class division is but only one dimension. The other was the widening gulf between the rulers and the ruled. In the face of an economy that was finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the idle and ostentatious lifestyle of an expanding lineage of princes, princesses, and their retainers and hangers-on, the ruling class continuously demanded the peasantry to bear the costs of this lifestyle through excessive and extortionate taxation. This reached its climax with the *kumoreti* under *Shehu* Bukar in 1883. By this tax, the peasantry was expected to surrender half of its wealth both in cash and kind to the state. These government policies coupled with man-made and natural disasters such as famine and plague towards the end of *Shehu* Hashimi's reign had compelled the people of Bornu to lose any community feeling to their rulers and the state. By 1893, the loss of national cohesion was total. Not even the threat of a foreign invasion was enough to unite them. *Shehu* Hashimi exemplified the crisis and decay of the Bornu state in the nineteenth century. Having a

large family of his own, he was understandably parsimonious. As rulers were usually assessed from within court circles on the basis of their generosity, he was extremely unpopular. His achievements in other areas were not impressive either. In the heat of the economic crisis prevailing in Borno at the time, the best he did was to put price controls on the sale of grains at the market of Kukawa. The independent actions of Abba Kyari and Mamman Tar, often bordering on subversion, and their widespread popularity were a consequence of the weakness and unpopularity of Shehu Hashimi.

On the diplomatic front, Hashimi, instead of responding to the feverish appeals sent early in 1893 by his vassal *Mbang Gwaranga* of Baghirmi on Rabih's invasion of his state, not only refused to help but opened communications with the invader. At this time, the markets of Borno were Rabih's main source of supplies for his military needs including gunpowder which, though banned, were however smuggled. Similarly, when Rabih invaded Borno instead of going out to fight, Hashimi was content with sending out a force under Mamman Tar, one of his known critics.

These internal problems were known to Rabih who had an efficient intelligence network. Militarily, the invading force though numerically inferior, was better organised. In fact, it was organised solely for war. In addition, it had superior firearms, marksmanship, discipline, and strategy. The invading force's strategy of choosing the battlefield, fortifying its position, and lining the riflemen behind fortifications was new to the Borno army. The Borno army depended on cavalry, which had predominated in the Central Sudan for most of the nineteenth century. Besides, Borno had not gone on any major military campaign in the second half of the nineteenth century. When the Borno force finally attacked, it fought in a half-hearted manner. In this as in subsequent battles, the success of the invader was inevitable as long as the cohesion of its fighting force was maintained and its enemy lacked cohesion and

co-ordination.

Immediately after the fall of Bornu, a spontaneous resistance movement sprang up under the leadership of *Mallam Abu Gantur*. Exhibiting some millenarian tendencies, the movement was a manifestation of the peasantry's disgust and disappointment with the legitimate rulers of Bornu over its inability to defend the state. Poorly armed but determined, the movement was smashed after an initial setback by the invader. The organised resistance under *Shehu Kyari*, though better armed and more powerful, lacked the ideological force that propelled the followers of Abu Gantur. The two resistance movements, though having the same aim, worked at cross purposes. Here again, it was the lack of unity and co-ordination that worked for the invader.

The Rabih state was established and maintained by force. A highly militarised state run by a tiny oligarchy in the *Zubat al-Kubar*, the whole state machinery was geared towards meeting the needs of the army, and its leadership. This veritable war machine was transformed into an administrative apparatus. The banner commanders became very important state officials. As it had no prior idea of running a state, the Rabih state maintained the pre-existing system of fief administration with some modifications. The new fiefs were invariably larger and more compact than those of its predecessors. Those provincial rulers of the al-Kanemi dynasty, who had submitted to the new regime, such as *Abba Sanda Laminumi* of Magumeri, *Kachalla Abdullahi Ali Marghi* of Gujba, and *Fugu Kyari Aduwulami* of Kauwa, were allowed to keep their holdings under the supervision of banner commanders resident at Dikwa. This system allowed for continuity and some semblance of normalcy, if not legitimacy. But legitimacy in the real sense was denied the new regime throughout its entire existence.

The existing economic base of the state was dislocated. Like the predatory army upon which it was based, the state appropriated maximally all resources, human and material, for the benefit of the army and its

command. Food production ground to a halt such that by 1897 a contemporary source suggested that Rabih might be forced to abandon Borno owing to shortage of food.⁷¹² Trade, both internal and external, like agriculture also ceased as no serious economic activity except slave raiding could thrive in a state of war. The losses sustained by the North African traders during the sack of Kukawa, the hostility of Wadai and the Awlad Sulayman Arabs, and the unwillingness of the Tuareg to hire out their camels on the Borno route, effectively closed the North African trade to Rabih until his death.

Borno's neighbours' perception of Rabih's intentions, often misleading, coupled with his hectoring diplomacy earned him their hostility. The association with Mahdism and its adherents in the Western Sudan, especially Hayatu b. Sa'id, made any meaningful relations with the Sokoto Caliphate and particularly Fombina otiose. There was, however, a softening of position towards Rabih with the breakdown of his relations with Hayatu b. Sa'id and his withdrawal from western Borno, in 1897. But this was not sufficient to guarantee his position economically and diplomatically in Borno. Attempts to trade with the Royal Niger Company on the Benue did not yield any results either. Rabih had so thoroughly conquered Borno that he had destroyed all that he could have inherited to make his conquest worthwhile.

By 1897, Rabih's position in Borno had become very difficult indeed. The state was denuded of food; trade with the outside world was cut off, while his demand for arms and gunpowder was increasing. It was at this time that the French appeared on the scene to further complicate his situation.

The arrival of the French along the Shari-Logone and in the Chad basin, and their alliance with his arch enemy Gwaranga of Baghirmi, engaged his attention for the rest of

⁷¹² PRO, FO 403/233: Statement of Hadj Arfan Turki. Incl. no 95, Tripoli. April 10, 1896.

his life. Though willing to trade with even his inveterate enemies, and had in fact sought to open relations with the Royal Niger Company for the procurement of military supplies, he still maintained consistently that only war existed between him and the Europeans. This is understandable in view of the role played by the Anglo-Egyptian government of the Sudan in the destruction of Sulayman Zubair in 1879 and their pursuit of him, which ultimately set him on his westward movement out of the Sudan into the Chad basin.

By his occupation of Borno, Rabih had put his power in unwitting opposition to the rising tide of European imperialism which, unknown to him, had shared out the area he occupied as spheres of influence among Britain, France, and Germany through various conventions and agreements between 1884 and 1899.⁷¹³

Rabih Fadl Allah fought fiercely and eventually died fighting the encroachment of European imperialism on Borno. Yet his struggle against European imperial domination cannot be said to have been undertaken for, or on behalf of the very people he dominated. For Borno, therefore, the resistance to Rabih's rule and domination was the beginning of the struggle against the colonial onslaught. The battle of Gashegar marked the final collapse of an independent Borno to colonial rule, first, under Rabih and subsequently under the European powers.

Between 1898 and 1900, Rabih engaged in series of battles with the French, and inflicted a heavy blow on them on one such occasion at Niellim in July 1898. But the French, having signed a treaty of protection with Baghirmi and received the support of Borno through Umar Sanda Kura, the leader of the Borno princes in exile, were

⁷¹³ It is believed that Fernand de Behagle, who met Rabih at Dikwa in 1899, was said to have explained European claims to the territory he occupied. de Behagle was hanged by Fadl Allah on Rabih's orders at Dikwa on October 15 1899; soon after the battle of Kuno. Hallam, 1977: 231, 247.

determined to occupy their sphere in the Lake Chad territory. The annihilation of the Bretonnet mission at Niellim had foreclosed any peaceful relations with Rabih. Force was the only option left under the circumstances. By April 21st, 1900, the three French missions had converged on the Lake Chad basin and put their forces under the unified command of Major Lamy. This force along with those of Gwaranga and Umar Sanda Kura advanced on Lakhta, defeated and killed Rabih on April 22, 1900.

In this battle, as in his previous wars, Rabih deployed his men behind fortifications for what turned out to be his last battle. This proved futile against the concentrated artillery fire of the enemy. In addition to superiority in arms and tactics, the French also had the support of the local populace. Similarly, the French had by persistent harassment compelled Rabih to divide his army into small units. It was with one of these units, albeit the biggest of them all, that he fought the French. But there were some strong units at Logone and Dikwa that did not take part in the battle.

Immediately after the defeat and death of Rabih, Fadl Allah re-organised the rump of his father's army and began a contest for Borno with both the French and the French-recognised *Shehu* of Borno. Between the death of Rabih and that of Fadl Allah, the French had aided Umar Sanda Kura to install himself at Dikwa. When they found him difficult to deal with, they replaced him with his younger brother, Bukar Garbai. Meanwhile Fadl Allah, who had escaped persistent French pursuit, had contacted and received British assurances of protection as long as he kept to the British sphere. Emboldened by his new found friendship with the British, and aware of temporary French withdrawal from Dikwa, Fadl Allah continued to harass the French and *Shehu* Garbai between November 1900 and August 1901. He was killed by the French while fighting to keep the *Shehu*-ship of Borno vacant pending the final determination of his case by the British. By the time British approval for his recognition was granted in July 1901, he had been killed.

by the French in "British" territory at Gujba on August 23rd, 1901.

With the defeat and death of Fadl Allah and the surrender of Muhammed Nyebe, Borno, which had been subjected to eight years of ravages and depredations, lay docile and prostrate before the French. It was treaty obligations between the European powers that stopped the French from occupying Borno. Frederick Lugard, who arrived from England to learn of the death of Fadl Allah at the hands of the French deep inside "British" territory, while communicating his anger and disgust to the Colonial Office and urging it to take up the matter with the French government sent out the "Lower Bornu Expedition" to occupy Borno and restore British prestige which might have been damaged by Ffetich activities in the area. This expedition reached Borno in March 1902 and sought out and recognised *Shehu* Bukar Garbai in April 1902.

Soon after his recognition by the British, the *Shehu* did not hide his desire to be independent of them. Rather than reside at Maifoni, where there was a British Resident and military fort, Bukar Garbai opted to live at Monguno pending the restoration of Kukawa as his capital. In spite of Tukur's study⁷¹⁴ and a few recent additions to the study of Borno under colonial rule,⁷¹⁵ a detailed and comprehensive study of the career of *Shehu* Bukar Garbai and his relations with the French and the British would throw more light on the Borno response to the colonial onslaught.

Described by the British as weak and incapable of an act of energy;⁷¹⁶ Garbai has impressed us as politically astute, pragmatic, and sagacious. In this transition *Shehu* lies the key to unravelling the Borno response to European occupation. Garbai survived the French who assisted him in

⁷¹⁴ Tukur, 1979; *idem*, 1989.

⁷¹⁵ Mukhtar, 1992; Ibrahim, 1994.

⁷¹⁶ NAK, SNP 15/1 Acc. 18, Bornu Report BM/8 of 1st May 1902 by Col. Morland, Commandant WAFF; NAK SNP 15/1 Acc. 19, Reports Bornu (1902), Resident W. P. Hewby, Bornu Province no.2 of 30th November, 1902.

supplanting his elder brother, ran to them when threatened by Fadl Allah, and dumped them in the pursuit of his essential interest when the British appeared and offered him the rulership of "British" Borno, which comprised the larger part of pre-colonial Borno in 1902. How widespread, for instance was the belief that the British occupation of Borno was going to be temporary? And how important was this belief in the acquiescence of its rulers to British rule? These posers and more recommend Garbai for a detailed study.

A Note on Sources

Travel Accounts

Many European travellers visited Borno in the nineteenth century, especially in the second half of that century. Such "travelogues" as those of Barth, Nachtigal, and Monteil provide very useful information about the period preceding the Rabih onslaught. Monteil, for instance, sojourned in Kukawa for four months in 1891, just two years before Rabih's invasion, and provided a detailed description of the Borno polity and society.

There are no contemporary European sources for the study of Rabih Fadl Allah's career in Borno. Fernand de Behagle, the only European to have been received by Rabih at Dikwa, did not survive the fast unfolding imperial drama to give any account. The nearest to contemporary sources are the writings of his European adversaries, such as Gentil, *La chute de L'Empire de Rabah*, Foureau, *D'Alger au Congo par le Tchad*, Reibell, *Le Commandant Lamy après sa correspondance et ses souvenirs de campagne 1858 - 1900*, and numerous journal articles including those of de Lamothe, Julien, Robillot, Reibell etc.

Though their records of observable events are fairly accurate, the same cannot be said of their interpretation of events. As adversaries of Rabih, objective assessment is demanding too much of them. However, the "travelogues" are important for reconstructing the history of Borno under Rabih Fadl Allah because of the scarcity of internal documentary sources. These French sources have provided firm dates for events in the later part of Rabih's rule. We have used these, some FO 101 files and the internal sources in fixing dates for some events.

Arabic Manuscripts

Arabic manuscripts dealing with Rabih are very scarce. This is not unconnected with the destruction caused by Rabih's occupation and the anarchy and uncertainty that followed the demise of Rabih, both of which would have militated against the preservation of documents of any sort. The most widely known manuscript is Liman Ali Arkwoyami's piece. This manuscript, titled '*Zikr wuqu Rabih*' by the Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies of the University of Maiduguri (the original is untitled), provides a theological explanation for the Rabih phenomenon in Borno history. It explains the arrival of Rabih as a punishment to the Borno people for their sins, social and political degeneration, and worldly lifestyle. It is from this document that we got a date for Rabih's entry to Dikwa which the author gives as Sunday 10th Jumada Awwal (November 19th). Like the oral sources upon which it is based, this manuscript equally gives the period between Rabih's sack of Kukawa and his entry to Dikwa as seventy days; while Rabih's total stay in Borno is given as six years and nine months.

M. Kalle's "Labarin Rabeh" (NAK, KADCAPTORY, O/AR 2, "Labarin Rabeh" 1338 A.H./1919 A.D.) is a Hausa rendition of the account of Rabih in *Ajami*. It seems this manuscript was put down in writing on specific request, very much like what Bala Usman calls the "Palmer papers".⁷¹⁷ As written records of oral traditions, these manuscripts share all the strengths and limitations of oral traditions in historical reconstruction.

Archival Material

In the Nigerian National Archives at Kaduna can be found the records of British colonial administration in Northern Nigeria. The historical information contained in

⁷¹⁷ Usman, 1981: 217-8.

these files, mostly District Notebooks, Annual Assessment, Re-assessment, Intelligence Reports, and Ethnographic studies are derived from oral traditions collected by British colonial officials. Most of the records were compiled in the early years of the twentieth century. Their strength as sources for our study lies in the fact that the information they contain were collected from people, of whom some were active participants in the events been studied.

The main weaknesses of these records are that most of these colonial officials did not understand Kanuri and therefore had to rely on interpreters whose English was poor. The possibility of misunderstanding was considerable if the interpreter thinks his English good or the colonial officer assumes his Kanuri impeccable. Most of these officers were not trained in the art of collecting historical information, especially oral traditions. Third, the very nature of the colonial situation and the master-subject relationship foreclosed any free exchange of information. Besides, even without these weaknesses the amount of information they contain, relative to their volume, is little.

Public Record Office, London

The Public Record Office contains substantial material relating to our study. The FO 101 files contain the archives of the British Consulate at Tripoli and Benghazi. The information they contain relate mainly, if not wholly, to Rabih's activities. These are mainly information collected at the North African end from traders returning from Borno, or letters received from traders resident in Borno in the 1890s.

The FO 2/118 files contain information on British policy towards Rabih. The diary of Sheriff Hassan (in Arabic), who visited Rabih at Dikwa, is also in this volume.

The CO 446 files contain mostly correspondence on Northern Nigeria and between Northern Nigeria and the Colonial Office between 1893 and 1903. These records have the same strength and weaknesses as those in Kaduna; in

fact a substantial part is duplicated with the Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna.

Oral Traditions

The oral traditions used for this study are those collected by Dr. Louis Brenner between 1965 and 1966 and my own collection. The "Brenner Fieldnotes" were collected for a similar research, leading to the award of a Ph.D. in History of Columbia University. Though Brenner's main interest was the political history of the al-Kanemi dynasty of Borno in the nineteenth century and actually stopped in 1893, the starting point for this study, he collected interesting information on the last years of *Shehu Hashimi* and the advent of Rabih. Besides, some of his informants had to explain the Rabih onslaught to complete their rendition.

The "Brenner Fielnotes" is very important because most of the information was derived from active participants. Dr. Brenner interviewed numerous informants but "only a few exhibited exceptional knowledge"⁷¹⁸ and consequently became his principal informants. Prominent among these were *Alkali* Bukar Ja'afar, *Abba Masta*, and *Abba Ali*. *Ja'afar*, Chief *Alkali* and grandson of *Mallam Muhammad Njotkomami* - Chief *Alkali* under *Shehu Umar* - collected most of his information from elders who had lived in Kukawa before the dispersal, while a young man at Dikwa. Dr. Brenner found *Bukar Ja'afar* the best informed of all his informants.⁷¹⁹ *Abba Masta* and *Abba Ali* are descendants of al-Kanemi and had good knowledge of the changing fortunes of the al-Kanemi dynasty. There is no mention of the ages of these informants as at the time of interview, but by the time the interviewer made a second trip to Borno, in 1969, both *Abba Masta* and *Abba Ali* had

⁷¹⁸ Brenner, 1973: 5.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*

died.⁷²⁰ Alkali Bukar Ja'afar equally passed on in the early 1970s, an apparent indication of their advanced age as of time of interview. It is, therefore, no coincidence that most of our information from the 'Brenner Field Notes' came from these informants. The interviewer's assessment of his informants is excellent.

Unlike Dr. Brenner who was furnished with some information but advised not to put it down in writing,⁷²¹ I have not encountered any such request. It is remarkable that the researcher honoured that request. I am not sure whether that information is reflected in the transcripts of the "Brenner Fieldnotes" or not, as I have used the information therein copiously and without restriction, courtesy of Dr. Brenner. Even if that information is recorded, it would be harmless by now, as most of his informants have since died. Besides, the interviews were conducted during the reign of Shehu Umar Sanda b. Kyari (1937-69), son of Shehu Kyari of Gashegar fame; it is not unlikely that his informants were avoiding opening old wounds. Fortunately, passions have calmed and people now discuss Rabih and the involvement of numerous Borno notables in his regime without inhibitions.

My own collection was done in 1993 and 1994. Most traditions collected were of the plain narrative type, except the praise songs of personalities or towns. They are preserved in the memory of our informants in an open form susceptible to all those factors that affect the human memory and lacking the inner structure with which to counter such possible distortions.

Most of my informants, irrespective of their social status, are supposed to know the history of their family, community, and its nineteenth century development. Some of them, such as Shaykh Abubakar al-Miskin, are renowned for their knowledge of Borno, its people and their history. Some are descendants of active participants in the events

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*

being described and see themselves as custodians of such knowledge. Prominent among these are Alhaji Abubakar Garba Sa'id of Kano, grandson of Hayatu b. Sa'id through Sa'id b. Hayatu, the only son of Hayatu b. Sa'id to have escaped the Hayatu-Fadl Allah skirmish on the outskirts of Dikwa in 1897. A keen historian and widely travelled informant, Alhaji Garba Sa'id has encouraged the study of the career of Hayatu, Sa'id, and Mahdism. He has himself given seminars and talks on these subjects. *Imam* Ibrahim b. Ahmad, current Chief *Imam* of Maiduguri Central Mosque, is another such informant. Grandson of *Liman* Modu Aisami through *Imam* Ahmad Talib (*Mashidima*), this informant is knowledgeable on the politics of Kukawa and the role of the *ulama* on the eve of Rabih's invasion of Borno. His grandfather, *Liman* Modu Aisami, one of the two *Imams* at Kukawa, was drowned while attempting to cross the River Yobe at Lumburam to escape Rabih's pursuit after the fall of Kukawa. Alhaji Yerima Mustafa, current *Waziri* of Borno, is great grandson of Laminu Njitiya and grandson of Abba Sanda Laminumi through Yerima Mustafa. Abba Sanda Laminumi had served the al-Kanemi dynasty dutifully like his father, but switched allegiance to, and served both Rabih and Fadl Allah as *chima gana* of East Magumeri fief under *Shaykh* Dahab. Quite knowledgeable about the history of his family but understandably not willing to disclose as much as he knows, given his sensitive position and the compromising role played by Abba Sanda Laminumi. He was the only informant who sought and received a set of questions some days before the interview.

There is a category of informants that I have not included in the list below. These are usually people reputed for their knowledge of, or interest in, the history of Rabih but cannot be classified as informants in the conventional methodology of oral historiography. Amongst these were Professor John Ellis Lavers and Mr. W.K.R. Hallam⁷²², both of whom had shared with me their intellectual concerns for,

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W.K.R. Hallam died in 1996.

and about, Rabih. Lavers granted me short interviews at Maiduguri and Potiskum in 1992 and 1993; a third appointment was not kept because of his failing health and subsequent death. Mr. Hallam, a retired colonial Police Officer in Borno, and himself the author of published works on Rabih, not only granted me an interview at Maiduguri but also directed me to the families of his informants. Others in this category include Alhaji Mohammed Adam, current President of Borno Museum Society and a former Commissioner for Education in Borno State. He is himself author of a book on the history of Dikwa.⁷²³ Professor Eldridge Mohammadou⁷²⁴ of the Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies of the University of Maiduguri is another such academic. A Cameroonian Fulata, fluent and working in French, German and English, he not only assisted with the German sources but commented freely on my research proposal and gave generously of his precious time.

Some of my principal informants, however, are descendants of the nameless majority who suffered harrowing experiences during the period under study. It is remarkable that they are the most eager to have the history of this period documented.

I initially set out to record my interviews on tape as well as take down notes but this was discontinued four months into the fieldwork when three cassette recorders and numerous recorded tapes were stolen at my field base. Thereafter, I resorted to recording the interviews in my notebooks. All interviews, except one in Hausa, were conducted in Kanuri. As a Kanuri first language speaker and fluent Hausa speaker, I recorded my notes in English, irrespective of the language in which it was granted. However, in case of praise-names, songs and praises of places and personalities, the original was taken down.

I was usually introduced to my informants by someone known to them, often a member of the family, or

⁷²³ *Dikwa: History of an African City*. Ikeja: 2000, 162 pp.

⁷²⁴ Prof. Eldridge Mohammadou died in February 2005.

someone close enough. In most cases I was accompanied to the first interview session by the person introducing me. I was often introduced by my relationship to the person introducing me, usually a friend or colleague, as a Borno student wishing to study the history of Rabih in Borno. This process of cultivating informants caused considerable delay but had the effect of eliminating the numerous visits usually required to be accepted by the informants. In such cases, informants talked without inhibitions, as from an old man to a younger person within the same community. Most informants interestingly found the project worthwhile, apparently because sufficient time had elapsed for the people of Borno to discuss the Rabih phenomenon less passionately. Some of the informants often suggested other informants, usually descendants of some prominent persons about whom I asked.

Most interviews took place at the informants' houses and at their convenient times. All the interviews were conducted between January 1993 and February 1994.

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Glossary

Unless otherwise stated all terms are Kanuri.
A- Arabic; B-Baghirmi; F-Fulfulde; H-Hausa; M-Mandara; S-Shuwa Arabic; W-Wadai

<i>abba</i>	Prince or person of noble birth
<i>agit al-bahr</i> (A)	Governor of the River
<i>alkali</i> (H)	Provinces
<i>alkyabba</i> (H)	Judge
<i>amil al-gharb al-Mahdi</i> (A)	Cloak
<i>amir</i> (A)	Representative of the Mahdi in the Western Sudan
<i>amir al-muminin</i> (A)	Leader
<i>askar</i> (A)	Commander of the Faithful
<i>bairaq</i> (A)	Soldier
<i>balta-balta</i>	Military Banner
<i>bayt al-mal</i> (A)	Patched uniforms worn by army
<i>bhityales</i> (A)	Public Treasury
<i>chima</i>	Cavalry
<i>chima kura</i>	Fief Holder
<i>chima gana</i>	Senior Fief Holder
<i>chima cidibe</i>	Junior Fief Holder
<i>chima jilib</i>	Territorial Fief Holder
<i>dandal</i>	Ethnic and\or clan representative
<i>firgi</i>	Palace square
<i>fulata</i>	Lacustrine lagoonal clay
<i>galadima</i>	Fulbe
<i>grema</i> (pl. <i>gremawa</i>)	Governor of western Borno
<i>hijra</i> (A)	Slave military title, subordinate to Kachellah
<i>jangal</i>	Emigration for a religious cause
<i>kachellah</i> (pl. <i>kachellawa</i>)	Livestock tax
	Senior military commander of slave status

<i>khalifa</i> (A)	Successor
<i>koguna</i> (pl. <i>kogunawa</i>)	Courtier
<i>kolak</i> (W)	King of Wadai
<i>lamido</i> (F)	Fulata King
<i>lawan</i> (pl. <i>Lawanwa</i>)	Village Head
<i>magira</i>	Queen Mother
<i>mahdi</i> (A)	Messiah
<i>mai</i>	King
<i>mainin kinendi</i>	Legal Adviser to Mai
<i>majlis</i> (A)	Council
<i>mallam</i>	Learned man
<i>mbang</i> (B)	King of Baghirmi
<i>nader</i> (pl. <i>nudara</i>) (S. Arabic)	Shuwa Arab unit of administration
<i>nana</i> (pl. <i>nanawa</i>)	Princess or female of noble birth
<i>nokuna</i>	Palace chamber
<i>sahib al-bairag</i> (A)	Banner commander
<i>sahib al-jinun</i> (A)	Commander of jinns
<i>sarki</i> (n) (H)	King (of)
<i>shari'ah</i> (A)	Islamic legal system
<i>shaykh</i> (A)	Very learned man
<i>shehu</i>	King
<i>talba</i>	Scribe
<i>tlikse</i> (M)	King of Mandara
<i>ulama</i> (A)	Scholars
<i>wakil</i> (A)	Assistant or representative
<i>waziri</i>	chief minister
<i>zibatta as-singhar</i> (A)	Non-commissioned officer corp
<i>zubat al-kubar</i> (A)	Supreme Military Council

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